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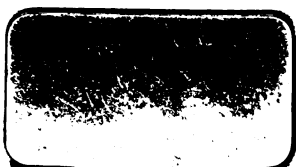
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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. II.



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THE
HEIRESS OF SOMERTON.

CHAPTER I.

"Sure—sure, such carping is not commendable."

SHAKSPERE.]

NOTHING could exceed the young clergyman's quiet attention to Mabel and her aunt, for the few succeeding days; the gentlest assiduity to please pervaded his manner, and he was not one likely to fail when he strove to be agreeable. Though they were much together, there was no further allusion to the subject they had been discussing; it seemed to have altogether passed from Mabel's mind, and he skilfully avoided anything which could call it back to remembrance, or lead to its re-introduction. His conversational powers were good; certain was he to be listened to whenever he chose to exert them,—certain was he to both impress and please.

Amid the general opening and reading of letters one morning, he announced, after looking over his, that he was compelled to leave Northcote that very day. His fellow-chaplain at the Bishop's, had been suddenly summoned away by the dangerous illness of his father. He himself must consequently return to fulfil the duties.

For a brief time did he see Mabel alone; and then, with a gay allusion to the conversation they had held together, said they would renew the theme at Beechwood: with great pleasure did he look forward to his visit there in the spring.

On the day previous to the one fixed for Mabel and her aunt leaving Northcote for the Manor, Sir James requested to see Mabel in the library. She found him busily turning over the pages of Lodge's Peerage; but, putting it down, he welcomed her with his blindest voice and manner.

"Let me make you comfortable this chilly day? Is your chair near enough to the fire? I see you have brought your crochet, so I hope you will afford me an hour's conversation ungrudgingly."

Mabel ensconced herself in an easy chair, and prepared to listen. Sir James preluded

by expressing his regret at her leaving them so soon ; though, brief as was her visit, it was long enough for a feeling of warm attachment to have sprung up in their minds towards her, a feeling which could not but strengthen in the long and close intimacy he trusted would follow. Then he spoke of her father. He, in common with all who knew him, entertained the highest esteem for him. As a man and Christian he was "*sans reproche*." He would say no more, for he saw it distressed her ;—fast were her tears falling—but he spoke of it before naming what, had God seen fit to spare his invaluable life, he should have named to him, instead of her.

The point was reached at last : it was the living of Somerton.

" You, dear Mabel, have a living in your gift ; I, a son in the Church. Need I say anything more ? We are too good friends, and near relatives, to require much circumlocution."

Mabel's heart fairly sank within her, when she understood her position ; her cheek burned, and her manner was greatly embarrassed, painfully so, as she mentioned Mr. Geary's wish for the appointment of a successor ; and also his wish, and her promise,

that *that* successor should have no taint of Puseyism.

Sir James smiled as she finished, and quietly pooh! pooh'd, the thing aside.

"Ah! these old-world clergy entertain such horror of changes. Anything new is, *of course*, inclining to Rome."

"But my cousin avowed to me that his prepossessions were in favour of Puseyism."

"He is young and ardent, my love, and has been thrown much with that party. The Bishop of —— is Lady Dysart's near relative. You know we are all acted upon by those we are with; but he is sure to lay it aside. We have all thought," he continued, "that, as you had no brother, or near connexion, in the ministry, the Somerton living would certainly fall to Rivers. As the Scotch people say,— 'blood is thicker than water.' Now I trust—as you assure me that there is no other claim to interfere with his (of course, if there were, I should not say another word)—that, if he clears himself from this unhappy imputation, *which smacks of Romanism*,"—he fixed a half-laughing, half-satiric glance upon her face—"there is nothing else to stand in the way."

Perceptibly did Mabel wince under the

light laugh ; but she mustered up her courage, and said,—

“No one *could* have the claim that her cousin had ; but, in so important a matter, she should wish to see more of him, and also to consult other judgments, before coming to a decision.”

Cold and haughty grew her uncle’s face and speech.

“Pardon me,” he said, “if I decline any intervention from third parties ; and beg that none may come between myself and my niece’s good pleasure.”

Mabel’s heart sent up a voiceless cry for help to come. It might be her distressed countenance that softened her uncle ; but his next words were kinder.

“I am sure, my love, you could see nothing about Rivers to disapprove of. You heard him in the pulpit ; you know how he visited the sick and the poor ; you saw his attention to his mother and myself. He does not, to my certain knowledge, enter into the thousand and one extravagancies which nearly all young men are addicted to. I have a large and expensive family, and my income is pretty well absorbed. There are few sons consider such matters : Rivers always does. I trust, Mabel,

you can tolerate a father dwelling upon his son's good properties?"

His voice trembled as he spoke of his son's consideration; and Mabel's heart smote her. Almost could she feel, the shadowy wings of her own dear father's love pressing down upon her, and bidding her sympathise with, and be tender to, all other fatherly love. And yet that father was so strict, so inflexible in right-doing, and so must she be. Never must *his* mantle rest upon disloyal shoulders.

"Give me but a little time, dearest uncle, to consider," she said, as she took his hand, and pressed her lips upon it. "Remember I am so young and inexperienced to decide on anything without consulting my guardians."

"Do not again give me occasion to say that I have nothing to do with your guardians; the thing rests wholly with yourself. Your mother's daughter need scarcely be so long in deciding whether she will oblige her blood relatives, I think," he said, with indescribable haughtiness. "I remember your mother, as it were but yesterday that I had spoke with her. She was as young, and almost as fair as you are, Mabel, when I knew her best; like her you are, but she was very different natured. Yes, like her you are, *but her heart was surely*

tenderer.—Many a frolic have we had together in this house; aye, in this very room have she and I oft sat and chatted. Nay, where you are sitting now did she sit, with smiles and blushes telling me about her marriage engagement with Adrian Somers, and how full of happiness she was, for she had given him her whole heart. A priceless gift it was: never have I seen your mother's equal,—never shall do. Scarce *then* could I look forward to a day coming when she would be in her cold grave, and I should be sitting here with her only child, asking from her a slight favour—it is not much—and that child be pondering in her mind whether or no she shall grant it.”

He spoke as if wounded to the very soul—Mabel's face was bowed down on her hands; she scarce could speak for weeping. Cruel was the trial to which she was subjected; but above pain and reproach too, towered the potent sense of right, of duty. Much more passed, but all of the same nature from both; Mabel flinched not from her position that her cousin must be more known, must be proved to be worthy, ere she could offer the Somerton living to his acceptance.

“I fear I have given you deep pain, dear uncle,” she said, with quivering lip, as, the

fruitless interview being ended, they rose to leave the library.

"Do not trouble yourself to speak of it, Mabel. There is so much that is painful to be gone through in life, that I for one care not to complain, when a little more comes than I had expected or think I need have had."

Great was Griffiths's astonishment at seeing Mabel enter her dressing-room, bathed in tears. She asked with much concern, "if she should fetch Mrs. Abney?"

"No, Griffiths, dress me as quickly as possible, I shall keep dinner waiting, I fear, as it is."

Under the clever hands of the *femme de chambre*, her toilette was soon completed; but what was there in the feminine repertory, that would remove the disfiguring tear-traces? Nothing, positively nothing, for they were as conspicuous as ever, after the whole circle of distilled waters and essences had been applied for their removal. Griffiths was in despair, her young lady never could appear with red and swollen eyes; would she dine in her own room, and join the party after dinner? No, it might bear the imputation of sullenness; there was nothing for it, but to make her appearance, tear-marks, and all. The last of

the party, every eye turned upon her as she entered the double drawing-room, blazing with light from lustre and girandole; turned, but was as instantly withdrawn. Mrs. Abney half rose to approach her, but the thought flashed—"Ah! some memory of my poor brother has been called up;" and she resumed her seat.

Dinner waited; and kind, dull Mr. Vavasour, seeing that something was not quite right, bustled up in a great hurry to take possession of her, and descanted all through the meal, at every interval, upon the superior claims of iron fences over quickset hedgerows, diversifying by a description of a new sort of harvest cart, and improved wheel-barrow, when the dessert came on.

"I am so glad you are coming to visit us soon, Miss Somers; you can then see all these things I have been telling you about, in use on my model farm; and you can see our two boys, such fine fellows they are, I am sure you would like them."

"I am sure I should," responded Mabel, heartily.

Slowly passed that last evening at Northcote; Mabel's eye was always seeking her uncle's, and his avoiding hers; nor did he approach, or ask her to sing as he had always

hitherto done. Though the strictest show of courtesy, as became the host to his guest, pervaded his manner, yet she felt in every word and tone, to what an immeasurable distance she was thrown from him.

That she had done right, she knew; yet did her heart ache intolerably. What would they think of her? she, the ungracious and unkind, when by a single word she might give so much pleasure. *Her heart was surely tenderer*, rang in her ears, was character'd before her eyes.

She tried to press Sir James's hand when bidding him good night; but his chilling fingers scarce touched hers; she meant to plead for herself by her look, (it should pray his pardon, beseech his forgiveness. She cared not how she humbled herself, so that he might be prevailed on to reinstate her in his regard.) But he met her yearning, most appealing gaze with a loveless smile, which sent her weeping and sleepless to her pillow.

Pale and dejected did she look the next morning, on meeting the family circle in the breakfast-room; but her cheek and eye immediately brightened under the influence of her uncle's good-morrow; his manner had regained all its former cordiality; he seated

himself against her, and talked most kindly. Her spirits rose at once, and she thanked him with both eye and speech; staying not to reason on the caprice of the thing, she gave him thanks as though she had been the veriest criminal, pardoned, with no right to pardon.

They left Northcote early. Sir James's farewell was not merely cordial, it was affectionate! "You will soon hear from either Rivers or myself," he whispered, ere he kissed her, and handed her into the carriage; "Don't forget my compliments to the Colonel, Mrs. Abney."

CHAPTER II.

"The best condition'd and unwearied spirit
In doing courtesies."

SHAKSPERE.

"God knows I'm glad to see you!" was Colonel Vallancey's most hearty greeting to our travellers on their arrival at the Manor, and he kissed Mabel with a most resounding kiss, and passed her on to his two daughters, whilst he assisted Mrs. Abney to alight.

A flood of warm light was pouring forth from the hall door, where stood Jane and Ellen waiting to throw loving arms round dear, dear Mabel, and Aunt Abney.

"Come in—come in, darling, you must be *so* cold," and they eagerly hurried Mabel in, each holding a hand, whilst the Colonel followed with Mrs. Abney, complimenting her at a prodigious rate—extravagantly, in fact.

"He could see even by that insufficient light, that she looked younger and better every day, it was delightful to see her looking so well."

Then what bustling there was to get their furs and warm wrappers off. What placing of them both close to the heaped up fire, what talking and laughing, what gazing at them with kind, kind eyes! The Colonel would hear nothing about toilette duties being performed; their present duty, he said, was to make themselves warm and comfortable, and then adjourn to the dinner table. Dinner had been delayed for their arrival, and was now served in a charming, old, wainscotted room, hung round with valuable paintings, and family portraits, (one a full-length, of a fine, stately young fellow, in military undress, you were sure was no other than the Colonel's son, so marked was the resemblance that it bore to him,) with lots of warm toned crimson drapery falling over the deep embrasured windows, and such a body of light from a gothic chandelier over the dinner table, and from a roaring fire in the most capacious grate; and it flashed so brightly upon painting and wainscot, upon crystal and silver, upon the two girls' pleasant faces, and upon the Colonel's beaming one, that anything more cheery and cosy there could not be. A forcible contrast was it to the measured stateliness with which everything was conducted at Northcote.

The Colonel pledged them in sparkling Moselle, and bade them welcome, again and yet again, and when the dinner was over he accompanied them back to the drawing-room, declaring that he would not be "left lamenting" by himself.

There they all drew round the glowing hearth to sip their coffee, and talk till bed time; and during that chat, the Colonel kept calling Mabel "his dear other child," and "his pet lamb."

A fine, frank, cheerful creature was the Colonel, with the same pleasant manners to high and low, rich and poor. Full of instinctive courtesy to all—a most hospitable entertainer—a delightful companion. Not but what he was self-willed enough, and liked his own way with the best, and would have it too; acting the part of an absolute monarch with his two *demoiselles*, keeping them in admirable order, and ruling peremptorily over their words and works; girding them in, hemming them round with chains and fetters, all forged and welded together in the glowing furnace of fatherly love. The Colonel knew no fear save that of his daughters leaving him, but of that he was in continual dread, 'twas the skeleton at his banquet. All sorts of precautions did

he take, strategy practise, to keep the intruder Cupid from his door. The little god was the enemy with whom no terms were to be kept,—the wolf in sheep's clothing,—the armed man seeking to despoil him of his goods. The foul fiend himself, would be as welcome at his hearth and board. Many a hearty laugh did those shrewd girls indulge at the circumvallations with which they were surrounded.

Without being exactly pretty, they were both comely and pleasant looking; sparkling with animation, good temper, and intelligence. Warmly attached to each other were they, yet very differently character'd. Jane, the eldest, was a gay, docile creature, with clear, laughing eyes, such a pretty mouth; and dimples, that were always displaying those faultless teeth of hers. But her hair was Jane's chiefest ornament, of a rich nut brown, or deep golden tint, (according to the light in which you saw it,) and falling in the waviest curls down her rounded cheek; constantly did it need a little throwing back of the head, and pretty movement of her slender white throat, to keep the petted things in place. Often she wore a slight gold chain, wound in and out, to confine her silky tresses,

which the Colonel had a great trick of pulling, generally calling her "a monkey" as he did so. Yes, Jane was plain, but pretty enough to become household divinity to the most fastidious man. Indeed, few had a shrine worthy of her, at least, so thought the Colonel, and he hugged the belief to his heart that he should keep his Jane under his own roof-tree.

Ellen, now just nineteen, was less attractive than her sister; looked out of calm, thoughtful, rather than mirthful eyes, but quickly did she inspire liking, so perfectly feminine was she, so quietly considerate, so actively kind, so much cheerful, household alacrity had she about her. She it was, who always placed the Colonel's chair in the same exact spot, and footstool to correspond; found his glasses when he lost them, placed his slippers ready, opened and aired the newspapers, placing the *Times* always beside his breakfast cup, read "Blackwood" aloud to him, (with extreme unction did he listen to the oracle,) occasionally, too, when the Colonel was lazy, she acted as his amanuensis. Many a pinch on the cheek, and "Thanks, my good Nell," did she get when performing these little offices, which he ever accepted with an air of vast contentment.

— The party was seated at breakfast. There was intense frost. The windows were starred over with phantasmagoria, that would all vanish when the bright, golden wand of the enchanter Sun, pointed towards them. But the cold was all unfelt in the genial atmosphere within. The urn was bubbling and hissing before Jane, the fragrant tea and coffee were steaming in the cups, delicious rolls were reposing in silver baskets, half hidden under finest, purest damask. The litter of envelopes and letters upon the table; the unmistakeable air of class about the ladies, habited in the simplest morning dresses; even the very aspect of the dogs, lying in dreamy enjoyment of the warmth upon the rug, added to the filling in and completeness of the thorough home picture.

Whilst discussing the meal, Mrs. Abney said,

“ I think you have a nephew of mine somewhere in this neighbourhood; have you not ? ”

“ To be sure we have, and a good fellow he is, too. Jane, remember that you write him an invitation to dinner, for his first disengaged day; say that my sister Abney is with us, and see that he is asked for Christmas Day.”

"Is he pleasantly placed?" inquired Mrs. Abney.

"Not at all, not at all, I believe: though Philip has never spoken to me upon the subject. But he is the Curate of a disagreeable old muff of a Rector, who cannot annoy or do enough despite to him, because he is well liked, and draws large congregations to the Church, which was almost deserted before he came."

"But there must surely be some deeper cause of offence than that," said Mrs. Abney.

"Why, I believe that Philip makes no distinction between Church people, and Dissenters in his parish; takes them house by house in his calls, which in itself gave great offence to the Rector; but when it came to his knowledge that Philip always sent a liberal contribution, whenever there was a charity sermon amongst the Dissenters, he was almost beside himself with rage, compared Philip to Samson at Gaza, pulling down the pillars of the house, and said, 'he wished he might, like Samson, be buried under the ruins.' 'An angry man was he, O.' I believe, from all I hear, that your nephew is a high-principled fellow, Anna; he is about to leave, (though the Rector can't remove him,) but I under-

stand that he says, he cannot stay to create strife, when his mission should be that of good-will and peace. Indeed, it is curious to witness the acrimony that has arisen in the place about him, and he so quiet himself. I have heard a good deal about him from one or two of the influential inhabitants; and indeed, from his being a sort of family connexion, (through you, you know,) I have rather kept my eye upon him. He has dined with us several times, but never a word has he said to me about his troubles; it is a pity he did not take to the army, he would have made a capital soldier, with that quiet, steadfast temper of his. There now, you need not laugh at that, Miss Mabel, I wish I had a living in my gift, I know where I would bestow it."

Mrs. Abney looked at Mabel and laughed, the Colonel also smiled very significantly.

"I should like to see your *rara avis*, I confess, just out of curiosity; but remember, I have got no living to give away, it is most distinctly promised."

"If he deserves it. You are quite right, my love, quite; don't make a promise hastily, but once made, keep it. I always feel to respond to that verse in the Psalms, which

speaks approval of the man, who promiseth to his own hurt, but changeth not. I think there are the elements of a good soldier about *you*, Mabel."

Gaily rang Jane's laugh, as she inquired if he really meant *that* for a compliment to Mabel?

"Of course I do, you giddy monkey; a higher one I could scarce pay her. By the way, talking of soldiers, what do you think that impudent fellow, Marcet," (the original of the portrait in the dining-room, the Colonel's only son, now high in rank in the Indian army,) "wants you to do, Mabel? Commend me to your modest fellows for effrontery. He wants you to write to him?"

The Colonel drew a long breath, as if quite overpowered.

"I am sure I will, dear uncle; when does the next Indian mail go out?"

"Ah! but that is not all the modest fellow asks for; he wants, now guess—you can't; well he wants your portrait; he's quite a milksop in caring for such things; he has got his mother's and mine, and his sisters'; and he says that his picture-gallery will be complete, when he gets yours; what do you think about that, Miss Mabel?"

“ He shall have it, I am sure,” she said, colouring only the least in the world.

“ There—I knew you would say so, though my two wiseacres of daughters thought you might consider it impudent, presumptuous. But I knew you better ; No coquetry—No prudery, is to be *our* motto, is not it ? ”

—The Rev. Philip Abney soon made his call upon his aunt, and was peremptorily ordered by the Colonel to stay and dine with them.

A gentle, unpretending manner, with a grave and thoughtful eye, distinguished the young clergyman ; though his face would have been plain, save for an amiable and winning smile irradiating it. The stamp of a refined nature, and cultivated mind were alike there : and something about him betokened the mental labourer ; one who went beyond the surface of subjects : dived down to their depths.

They were just sitting down to dinner, when there came such a lusty ring at the door bell, that it resounded through the house.

“ Who have we here ? ” quoth the Colonel.

Just at the instant, Mabel was speaking to Jane ; what *could* be the cause of that sudden change of countenance ? her face was suffused to the deepest crimson ; and the words she

had bent forward to listen to, were evidently no longer heard.

"Jane, Jane! how *could* you think of filling my soup-plate in this way? you know quite well that I don't care for Mulligatawney?" said the Colonel, with an air of great vexation.

"I'm very sorry, dear Pa. I did not think what I was doing."

"Then, *what* were you thinking about? letting your ideas go whirligigging when your attention is required for the duties of the dinner table and its —— why, bless me! it's Harry Malcolm," he said, glancing at the card the footman presented on his salver; "he'll have some dinner, of course. Come in, Harry, come in, don't make a stranger of yourself," he called, rising from his chair.

"It is most truly kind to take in a benighted traveller in this way," said a pleasant sounding voice; and the owner of it, a fine-looking moustached young officer, entered the room.

Cordially was he greeted by the Colonel, and Jane, and Ellen, and then the guests were introduced to Captain Malcolm.

"Take a seat near the fire—you look cold—and have some soup. If my daughter helps you in the lavish fashion she has done me, you will cry 'Hold, enough!' And now that you

are in a fair way of being comfortable, give an account of yourself."

"That is soon done. I had some little business with Birch, the solicitor at Atherton; when I got there, I found he had been sent for to make a will, so I had to wait for him, and it threw me late; and I did not like to pass your hospitable door, knowing that you never turn the beggar from your gate."

"Quite right of you, Harry: from north, or south, you had been welcome; let me advise you champagne first, it will help to thaw you. Is it not freezing sharply?"

"It will freeze the mercury before it has done, I fancy; it is a famous time for the skaters," replied the Captain.

"Aye, it's seasonable weather—something like an old-fashioned December. By the way, Harry, you must dine with us on Christmas-day; and you, too, Mr. Abney?"

Both the young men looked and expressed their thanks.

Mabel was seated against Mr. Abney; but whilst listening to his gentle words, she was looking at Jane, for some change had come over her: she was silent (an unusual circumstance), and her eyes were cast down, which was still more unusual; generally were they

travelling round, challenging some one or other to a saucy laugh, or jest; her colour was high, feverish again. She at length looked up and caught Mabel's almost inquiring glance, and answered it with an unresting smile.

"How does the bazaar work go on, Miss Ellen?" asked the young officer.

"Very well, indeed; we have almost completed our portion."

"When do you think of holding the bazaar, Miss Vallancey? I hope you do not intend to pass a vote of exclusion on military men?" he asked with a deferential air.

"Certainly not; we shall look for the support of both the military and clergy," replied Jane, throwing him a saucy look, and giving a smile to Mr. Abney; "but we shall not hold it, till the fine spring weather comes, that we may have an assured bright day, for showing ourselves and pretty dresses, as well as our needlework."

Who said Jane was plain? nothing of the kind, she was lovely with those brilliant eyes, that flitting colour, and sparkling play of countenance.

"Do you think, Captain Malcolm, if we were to draw up a pretty,—very pretty round robin from the lady contributors to the officers

of the —th, asking, as an immense favour, for the use of the military band on the Bazaar day, that they would grant it?"

"There cannot be a shadow of a doubt, Miss Vallancey, we should feel only too honoured in the request."

"We shall have a post-office, Captain Malcolm," said Ellen, borrowing one of Jane's arch looks, as she spoke.

"Ah, indeed! Will you receive as well as give out letters?" inquired he.

"Yes, certainly; and we shall be more moderate in our postage than they were at the Haversham Bazaar; they had the conscience to charge Sir George Fleetwood two sovereigns for a letter."

"I don't think we shall exceed the very reasonable charge of five shillings," said Jane; "I rather think of being post-mistress myself. I shall be very discreet, Mr. Abney, if you will entrust me with any *billet-doux*."

The grave young clergyman smiled at her lively challenge, but said—

"That she would not be sufficiently accredited for him to trust her with correspondence. He might perhaps send her a few tracts, if she would promise faithful distribution."

"That I will. Have you any upon the

horrors of war, and the uselessness of it?" asked she, with an arch eye-beam for the military man. "Have you any 'Tracts for the Times' upon the nonsenses of Puseyism? I should need those for quite a different quarter," directing a most laughing glance at Mabel as she spoke. Mr. Abney turned, with the most earnest look upon his face—

"Surely *you* are not imbued with Puseyism, Miss Somers?"

"I am not aware that I am," answered Mabel; "but Miss Vallancey is throwing her missiles right and left."

"Are you quite sure, Mabel, quite certain that you are not the least in the world inclining? Come, we will put you into the confessional. Mr. Abney, will you kindly act as shriver? Just look at my cousin's bracelet; see, if there is not a pendant there, that to me looks wonderfully like a cross, if not a crucifix? Guilty—guilty, without doubt—'Tis the badge of all our tribe.' All the young ladies under the influence of the Puseyite ministry, wear the cross attached to their chains and bracelets, and it is, of course, to be found on their dressing-tables."

"You cannot have a word to say, Mabel, and I give you over to Mr. Abney's tender

mercies, who must either convert or excommunicate you forthwith."

"But now to revert to my post-office. As there are tracts upon every subject, surely some are to be found upon homœopathy? Now, I should require those for another quarter still." (Mrs. Abney gave the merry Jane such a shake of the head.) "And for yourself, Mr. Abney, I should address to you merely a blank sheet of paper, with this heading—'On returning Good for Evil.'"

Mr. Abney's face glowed with pleasure at the graceful compliment.

"Well done, Jane! well done! You think no one could fill it up better than our young clergyman; and I take this opportunity of saying, Mr. Abney, that I quite agree with my daughter," observed the Colonel, with much emphasis.

Mr. Abney bowed his most pleased acknowledgment.

"For you, papa, I would send a tract, entitled—'How to keep Daughters in order, and yet make them love you.' And now I have done."

She gave the mystic signal to the ladies, who rose, and the Captain opened the door.

As Jane passed the Colonel's chair, he

seized her hand, his eyes sparkling with delight, and held it for an instant whilst he said, "You monkey!"—with a ringing peal of laughter did Jane break from him. As the door closed upon them, the Colonel, composing his face into steadiness, said—

"I hope you two young men may have as much comfort in your daughters—when you possess them—as I have in mine."

Brief as the time was, before the gentlemen followed the ladies, it was long enough for Jane's restlessness to return; keep quiet she could not. Peremptory was the Colonel's call for music; it was of course only to admire the beauty of the lovely greenhouse blooms, that Captain Malcolm took up the bouquet Jane laid down when she went to the instrument; and it was in sheer absence, no doubt, that he abstracted that pretty camellia from it.

It suddenly occurred to the Colonel that it was possible Philip Abney might know something of Mr. Riverstone Dysart, as both were Oxford men, so he took him for a quiet chat into the library. Nor was he mistaken in the supposition; both had entered at the same college, though Philip said, "they had never drawn together at all, for Mr. Dysart had early and decidedly attached himself to the Trac-

tarian party; in fact, was believed to be one of its warmest partizans. He was considered to be very talented; had a great natural gift of eloquence; studied all the niceties of rhetoric and elocution; was a steady and confirmed worker; had never heard word breathed against his moral character."

"You have lost sight of him, I suppose, since you left college?"

"Not exactly; his fellow chaplain at the Bishop of —— is a near relative of mine, and we now and then exchange a letter. Mr. Dysart's name is sometimes mentioned; his religious views are, I believe, quite unchanged. But, will you allow me to inquire *why* you put these questions to me?"

"Why, to tell you the truth," said the Colonel, with a particularly confidential air, "I want to learn as much of the gentleman as I can; he is a connexion of my ward, Miss Somers, and——"

"Then I must beg to rescind what I have said. All are so liable to misrepresentation, and I may be quite mistaken about him."

"Why, man, you have told me nothing—nothing at present," said the Colonel with a laugh, "I must learn more."

"Not from me, Colonel."

“Bah! my good fellow, what nonsense is this. You *cannot* suppose that, I”—here he drew himself up to his stateliest demeanour—“want any treachery, Sir; or anything but the truth; which, through your friend, you might learn for us without breach of confidence?”

“Pardon me, Colonel,” began the young clergyman, looking really distressed.

“No, Sir; I shall not pardon your implying that I ask something from you, which an honourable man need shrink from. You are a very fastidious young man, let me tell you, Sir; and very absurd and ridiculous.”

With a very grand air had the Colonel looked and spoken; but a smile soon won its way back. Philip’s nicety of idea was far from being out of the pale of his sympathy; ’twas an error on the side of honour, and therefore sure to win appreciation from him.

“Well, Sir, you may take your *congé*; as you will not assist us, why we will do without you, that is all,” he said, as he waved him out of the room, and bid him return to the ladies.

It gave them no little gratification at the Manor, when Mabel began to give sittings for her portrait, to one of the first portrait painters of the day. It was a family tradition, “that there had never yet been a plain Somers;” that

personal beauty was a family heritage. Certainly Mabel was dowered with surpassing loveliness; and most lovely was her portrait: full of exquisite grace, and sunniness, and sweetness. "Fairer, rarer face was never pictured," said they all.

An exceedingly pleasant house to stay in was the Manor; everything about it was so cheerful. The Colonel himself, was full of all sorts of amenities, of good temper and fatherliness: the sprightly, happy-minded daughters, were most companionable—ready for everything the day brought with it—going out or staying in, walking, talking, working, reading aloud, or keeping still; nothing came amiss: they could and did adapt themselves to everything with the liveliest alacrity—never out of spirits, or vacantly yawning with *ennui*; no dull days, nor tedious time ever came for Jane and Ellen.

The Colonel was old-fashioned enough to wish horses, and servants too, to rest as much as possible on Sabbaths or Holy-days; so they all walked to Church on Christmas-day. The sun was shining bravely, the pure crisp snow was dazzling, and the keen frosty air made the young ones of the party as rosy and blooming as need to be. Something to say to

everybody who met or passed them had the Colonel, and not less cordial, than respectful were the salutations on every side addressed to him. Unfailing was the "Merry Christmas to you, Sir."

"Thank you — thank you : the same to you," was the invariable reply, in a fine sonorous voice, and most courteous accent—his countenance beaming with the hearty goodwill he felt.

A goodly number assembled to dinner under his warm roof-tree ; the Vicar of the parish, the Rev. Dr. Kennedy and his lady headed them. Captain Malcolm took Mabel in,—he was just the pleasant sort of body one enjoys getting against at a dinner table—frank, animated, and without conceit,—a little dash of sentiment, and perceptible air of deference, distinguished his manner when conversing with the gentler sex ; but ready was the open smile and piquant word, to brush it all away.

He had kept Mabel so amused by his easy chat, that she had scarce noticed what was going on around her, till some one on the other side of the Captain addressed him, and then she looked round, and first at Jane.

A mystery again was Jane ; all flutter and excitement ; happy—gay enough, but with

such restless light in her eyes! such rich burning colour in her cheek! Then there was Nelly beside Mr. Abney, very prepossessing was his countenance when conversing; a look of such a gentle nature upon it. Listening complacently to a Major Harewood, an old campaigning friend of the Colonel's, sat Mrs. Abney; Jane had whispered Mabel that he had been a warm admirer of Aunt Abney's in her "salad days," so that accounted for his air of close attention now. Most politely assiduous to the Vicar's lady was the Colonel; who at length rose to speak. Rather fond was he of giving utterance to some of those cheerful, friendly thoughts of his.

"On this day of High Church Festival and universal gathering together, when peace and good-will abound, we hope, in every Christian heart—I can answer for my own—we will break through the rigid laws of etiquette, and pledge each other heartily. Gentlemen, look to your respective ladies. Mrs. Kennedy, let me have the pleasure of taking wine with you."

Nothing was heard for a brief space save the buzz and murmur of voices, as everybody dutifully obeyed the mandate.

What prompted Mabel, she could not tell,

to glance at Jane when Captain Malcolm asked her to take wine; but she did so, and now she knew her secret! the unmistakable look which flashed (only for an instant, as it was), betrayed her.

The Colonel was surely the pleasantest of hosts—so hearty and hospitable. Constantly was his voice heard, raised in giving words to some kindly sentiment, to one or other of his guests, or in the relation of some brief and piquant anecdote. A little tremor crept into his tones, when he thanked them for remembering his son, after they had drank to the health and fame of the brave young officer in India.

It is amusing to note with what apparent undesign, but with what tact and cleverness, gentlemen group themselves in a drawing-room; how certain they are to find the seat they most prefer, against the one they most wish to talk to. Captain Malcolm dropped into a chair beside Miss Vallancey, whose uncomfortable restlessness passed away at once. In the flow and stream of lively chat going on, no one, save Mabel, observed how Jane's eye, ear, and every thought seemed to be engrossed with him thus sitting beside her.

In the sacred music that followed, the

Colonel went almost into an ecstasy—(very rich, holy, and sweet were its cadenced risings and fallings!—the soft fine tenor voices blending in exquisite harmony with Mr. Abney's deep bass, which was magnificent in singing!)—humming, nodding, beating time to it most energetically, in the vastness of his delight. Barely was the chorus finished—the ear, at least, was loth to believe it done, ere he called out—

“Philip, how is it you have never told us of that organ-voice of yours? why, man, it would make your fortune!—you would beat Lablache out of the field!”

“I can scarce think it would be my vocation, Sir,” answered the young clergyman, looking very amused.

At the breaking up of the party, all took leave, save Captain Malcolm; for him a room had been prepared. The —— barracks were so distant, that the Colonel would not hear of his leaving the Manor that night.

There was a very vexatious justice case came before the Colonel (as one of the county magistrates) the next morning; vexatious, inasmuch as the evidence ran perfectly counter to his own belief of the accused's innocence. He was obliged to remand the case, feeling quite

teazed with it; and was busy consulting his law-books anent the matter, when there came a gentle rap at the door.

"Come in," was mechanically uttered; and in accordingly walked Captain Harry Malcolm, looking (if the Colonel had not been too engrossed to notice) somewhat unlike himself; far from wearing his usual easy, self-possessed air.

The Colonel's eyes were raised for an instant.

"Ah! Harry, is that you? I'm so bothered with a charge I have had brought before me this morning; I can't see into it at all; and now I'm aggravated with losing my spectacles! I had them only a minute or two back, and they have got shuffled off somewhere, I suppose, amongst these papers. I must have Nelly in to find them, for I can't."

Whatever the reason and cause for Captain Harry's *distract* look, it did not prevent him making the discovery, that the missing glasses were just in their proper position on the Colonel's nose, and he told him so.

"God bless me! how stupid and absurd I am, not to know whether my spectacles are on, or off! But Justice *is* represented blind, you know; and I'm horribly vexed over this case."

Without further attention to Captain Malcolm's presence, he went on referring and speaking to himself:—

“What does Burns say about it? I will not believe it; a straightforward hard-working man, punctual to a day. *It cannot be.* Yet, to be sure, there *is* no telling; some lying spirit *may* have sat at his ear, and beguiled him into wrong. We are all human, and very prone to do evil, very.”

Here, reaching down another book, his eye rested upon Harry, who was waiting his leisure most patiently.

“I'm sure I beg your pardon for keeping you waiting so long. Sit down, Harry: you have something to say to me?”

“Yes, I have, Colonel; but I would rather wait till you are perfectly disengaged.”

“I am so now. I have remanded the case till Monday, that I may get more light upon it. So now I am at your service.”

CHAPTER III.

"Sweet saints, it is no sin or blame,
To love a man of virtuous name."

SPENSER.

CAPTAIN MALCOLM seated himself, and took up a paper-cutter to drum upon the table with. The Colonel also sat down, and took off his glasses. Without *their* aid, he could see the young officer's changing countenance.

Harry Malcolm was a favourite with him—he had a character something akin to his own; and he thought, as he saw his embarrassed look, "Ah! he has been getting into some scrape or other, that he wants me to help him out of—been outrunning the constable a little, perhaps."

Answering his own thoughts, he said:—

"Anything I can do for you, Harry? got into some mischief, or into debt? I was young myself once, and know that these things will happen. You may command me, you know."

Harry stammered out a few words at last, but they were half inaudible; something about

asking a favour, the very greatest that he ever, in his whole life, *could* have to ask.

Very amused did the Colonel look, and fixed such a laughing eye upon him as he said,

“ Well, man, don’t speak in riddles. What is this mighty favour? Do you want to exchange? I have some little interest, you know, at the Horse-Guards, and it is yours if you like to task it.”

The Captain made a bold and desperate effort.

“ It is nothing of that sort, Sir. What I ask is from yourself only—your permission to address Miss Vallancey.”

The glasses which the Colonel had been carelessly twirling round, fell from his hand. Harry stooped to pick them up, his face perfectly crimson.

“ To do what?—Ask me again, Harry: I don’t quite understand.”

Now the young man’s words found way; he was not merely fluent, he waxed eloquent in dilating upon Jane’s merits and his own unworthiness. Very slowly and unwillingly did the Colonel receive the truth into his mind, that he was asked to *part* with one of his treasured daughters, that he had been father and mother to for so many years, that he had

reared up with so much care and painstaking to be the light and comfort of his own hearth and board. Yes, one of *his* household darlings was coveted by another; asked for to make light and joy in another's home—pleasantness in another's path.

Grim enough was his smile, as he asked Harry "If he had not better, when he was about it, beg the half of his estate? he would give it him with a gladder heart, than he would give his Jane."

Then he sat silent, in self-pitying and still half-incredulous amaze. After a while came the question,—

"Is this a sudden thing, Harry?"

"It is not, Colonel. I don't remember the time when I have not—to use a cold word—admired her. Even when, as a child, she was so much with my sisters, I felt to love her better almost than I did them; but as I grew old enough to understand my own feelings, I knew it was a very different sort of affection to that I bore to them."

"Does Jane know of this, Harry?"

"She does," he said, and his eye fell.

"When did she learn it,—yesterday, or to-day?"

"I can scarcely tell you when. I believe I

betrayed my secret long before the words found utterance."

"Ah! and *when* might those be spoken?"

The Colonel's eye was kindling. Harry's cheek and brow again flushed crimson, and his voice was disturbed, as he said,—

"I believe it is about six months since."

A hot glow darted into the Colonel's face, and his eye shot fire, as he rose from his chair, and drew up his full-sized, military form to its greatest height.

"Our conference is at an end, Captain Malcolm. I had thought that, in welcoming the son of one of my oldest friends to my house, I was doing it to a young man of honour and uprightness."

"Oh, Colonel, Colonel," said Harry, in the deepest distress, "believe me, by everything sacred, that your ignorance of it has arisen solely from Jane's solicitude for your feelings. She was sure that, come when the request might, it would be all too soon."

"Go and fetch her in, Sir!"

Stern was his voice, yet was there more of sorrow than anger in its tone. Harry rose eagerly, for the interview was most painful.

The Colonel turned to the table, and buried his face in his hands.

"Mole and bat that I have been," he said. "But Jane, Jane my child, and child of my sainted Ellen, you should not have hidden it from me."

In together came Harry and Jane; her face was flushing and paling, scorching and growing white in quick succession; and she was trembling so with agitation, that she could scarcely stand.

The Colonel slowly lifted up his face to look at her; but her eyes declined to the ground; she dared not meet the silent accusation of his sad countenance. Harry retained her hand, as they stood for judgment before him. Again the angry gleam flashed.

"Drop her hand, Captain Malcolm, and leave me with my daughter: go to the window, Sir!"

Stern was his voice; and Jane, the culprit, panted with fear; so she flew for refuge to his arms.

"Papa, Papa, Harry tells me that you think we have deceived you."

Jane's lip went quiver, quiver; his hand she covered with kisses and with tears.

"You *have* deceived me, Jane; *this* going on, and I, so much concerned in it, not allowed to know. Have I been such an un-

kind father? Have I been so severe and harsh with you?"

Tenderest reproach was in his tone and look. Her arms went round his neck; her face was hidden on his shoulder, and she sobbed as if her heart was breaking.

"No, no, not unkind; but so very, very kind."

"You have been acting a lie, Jane. Are acted or spoken lies worst? You could scarcely have grieved me more. I thought that my teaching, from your very cradle, had been to reverence truth."

"I have been sadly wrong, Papa. All *my* fault it has been. I would not let Harry tell you, for I knew you would be so sorry to part with me. Very, very wrong it has been, Papa, and so Harry said. I, only, am to blame," she faltered out.

With hot and bitter tears did she promise never, never to depart from truth again;—no, not if it would win her a kingdom, she said.

"More likely to lose you one," replied the Colonel, who now was getting very softened, all the sternness passing from his unaccustomed features with the sight of those most penitent tears.

"Now that I have done all the scolding,

I must come to the questioning. (Be good enough not to look round this way, Captain Malcolm.)—Jane, do you love Harry? Should you like to spend your life with him?"

Smiles, and blushes, and tears were all mingling on Jane's face at once, as she looked with half-veiled eyes at her father. Whatever the answer might be, it was whispered in so low a tone, that Captain Malcolm could not catch it, though lovers' ears are proverbially quick.

"And do you believe, Jane, are you quite sure, certain, that Harry loves you?"

A bright blush, and a brighter smile heralded her answer.

"I am quite sure, Papa."

"Then now, Harry, you may come—mind you, I don't give her to you with a willing heart; but God forbid that I should stand in the way of my child's happiness. Only love her, Harry, half as well as her father has done, and Jane, and I too, may be content and satisfied."

"She shall never know a sorrow that I can shield her from," said the exulting lover with all his heart's affection beaming in his eyes. "Man never received a more precious gift."

"You may kiss her, Harry, if you will," said the Colonel.

The lover did not wait for Jane's permission, but passed his arm round her waist, and very heartily kissed her over and over again.

"There now, leave me, *my children* ; I much need to be alone, and recover myself."

Jane broke away even from her lover to ask (with such earnest eyes from which the tears were scarcely dried,)

"Whether with his heart, with *all his heart*, he forgave and loved her as he did before."

He took her two hands from Harry (who had got hold of them both) into his own, drew her towards him, and pressed a fervent kiss upon her forehead.

"Fully and freely do I forgive you, my Jane ; but, my daughter, as I believe it has been your first, let it be your last deception, your very last. Hold fast to the bright truth, and then neither father nor husband," (a sudden tremor seemed to catch his voice as he looked, half smilingly, half sorrowfully at Harry,) "*can* have aught but perfect and entire trust in you, my love."

Very near the spring of joy was the fountain of tears with Jane ; for they were falling fast

over the troubled crimson of her cheek, as Captain Harry took possession of her again, and bore her off in triumph to announce the tidings to the party; but not long did they fall, for he whispered, and whispered in her ear, till the smile came back; and her eyes laughed out once more.

"*I did not wait to be told, I found out your secret, dear Jane,*" said Mabel, as with a loving kiss, she wished her joy.

— Soon did Captain Harry get into the way of twining her silky, petted tresses round his fingers, and telling her, "That bright head of hers was a study for a painter."

For a few days, the Colonel was scarcely himself; very tender was he to Jane, very fatherly; but he spoke less, and his voice got a little tremulous sound with it, very unlike its usual tone. Such a blythe, cheerful spirit was his, that constantly had he been breaking forth into singing some fragment of antique ballad, or refrain, humming and tuning it over in the full gladness of his heart, both in doors and out. One, he was particularly addicted to; of which the chorus ran—

"For every evil under the sun
There is a remedy; or there's none.
If there is one: try and find it;
If there is none: never mind it."

Mabel had caught the air and words, and added her sweet tones to his, whenever he commenced it; but just now the Colonel left off singing and humming, and quite forgot to practise the wise philosophy which he had erewhile so commended. But this *doléance* did not last long; in a week's time, he began to joke Jane and Harry; complimenting the Captain with much humour, on the good generalship, and soldierly ability he had displayed in so completely outflanking *him*, till the others were almost convulsed with laughter, and Jane would be calling out for—

“Mercy, dear Papa, mercy.”

On quietly considering the matter over, apart from feeling—“feeling invariably leads people wrong,” says that high authority, Sir James Dysart—the Colonel found that there was every outward reason to be pleased with the connexion for Jane. Birth and property were beyond all question, and Harry himself was a fine, manly, honourable fellow, all that could be desired; so he reconciled himself to it, and said with a smile, “That the young birds *would* fly out of the nest, and that there was no going against Nature.” And that very day he commenced anew to tune—

“For every evil under the sun,”

which Mabel instantly caught up, and they sang it together, not once merely, but twice and thrice over in capital style.

No day, that he was free of military duty, passed by without Captain Harry's presence at the Manor. With smiles and blushes did Jane always receive him, and the most stoical are not proof against these heart-stirring things. Very soon did he begin to talk about being married; but the Colonel frowned, and, calling them "a couple of children," positively forbade all mention of such a thing, till Jane was twenty-one, which would be at Midsummer.

Very pleasant letters had Mabel received from both Sir James Dysart and her cousin Rivers: no shuffling whatever of *the* subject in debate. The young minister said, "He had entered upon a rigorous examination of the points of difference between High Church principles, and the others, with a most earnest desire to arrive at the truth. That truth arrived at, *by it* he would shape his life and ministry. Light would doubtless be given to fervent prayer, and deeply anxious inquiry." The little he said about not sacrificing his conscience on the altar of expediency; under no circumstances making merchandise of that;

was characterised by much good sense and propriety. On the whole the letter was very satisfactory. After perusing, Mabel gave it to the Colonel, asking him to look it over, and forward it to Mr. Ferrand.

The Colonel received it with a shrug and grimace; but his high sense of honour kept him from saying one biassing word. Mrs. Abney was scarcely as scrupulous; she entered with feminine warmth into the matter, and most devoutly hoped that the Reverend Rivers would *not* alter his religious views. She wasted an immense deal of oratory upon her nephew, to induce him to gain information for them from his friend, but he was inflexible.

“He did not, could not, consider it honourable,” was his gentle, but unvarying reply. Excessively angry would Mrs. Abney have been had she known how easily he *could* have put them in possession of the required knowledge: for he had again heard from the Rev. Arthur Steadman, Mr. Dysart’s fellow-chaplain. Amongst much extraneous matter was the following *morceau*—

“Dysart has had a pretty good living offered to him on the condition that he will renounce High Church principles. The question is submitted to the higher powers, and the

response not yet given, though *that* can scarcely be doubtful, as the command runs, 'To become all things to all men.' We are enlarging our boundaries unmistakeably. Why will you not come amongst us? Why, of the faithful, *you* be found faithless? The Church hath need of you, Philip, for her Propagandism; for you, and such as you, whose gift lies in the voice—and in that wondrous charm of persuasiveness which sinks like dew into the heart. Our pulpits lack not learning—eloquent, ardent, and stirring—but we are wanting for the Home Mission, men to win souls to the Church by the all-seductive power of gentleness. *We* alone understand and realize its potency, when brought to minister at the domestic altar. For *this* ministry I would say, as Nathan the prophet did to David, 'Thou art the man.' Come amongst us, and join us in our fraternal aim and end, to compass the earth as it were with a girdle—to bind the whole world in one all-linking band of brotherhood, and religious unity. The highest, the most soaring ambition need ask for no more. Think of the sublime majesty of the True Church, when pinnaced on the whole world: 'And the nations shall be bowed down under her feet.' Give *your* talents, consecrate *your* powers to the holy

work. Come! By us you are known, marked, estimated at your true value. Come! If I had but half your power of persuasiveness, you would have been of us, and amongst us, long ere this. But again I say, 'Come, and quickly;' and a very shout of welcome and acclaim will greet you."

The Colonel peremptorily ordered Mr. Abney to spend a week at the Manor before he left the neighbourhood. He, seemingly "nothing loth," accepted the invitation, or rather obeyed the command. It was the very day he came that another secret oozed out, and this one concerned Ellen. It was never rightly understood how it got wind; whether it was through Jane, or Captain Harry, or both. Some one wickedly suggested that, as, of course, Harry knew everything that Jane knew, the lovers had plotted to make Nelly's secret known, by way of diverting *some* of the Colonel's pungent raillery from themselves to *her*. Be that as it may, it *was* revealed to the assembled party that Nelly had been—No, Nelly had *not* been falling in love, as is, of course, straightway imagined; but Nelly had been writing a novel.

Yes, the quiet and gentle Ellen, whose eye was so discerning, hand so quick, and will so

prompt, to render help and assistance to everybody that needed; who never waited for asking, but was always "ready, aye, ready," had actually found time to write a novel—had begun and finished it.

"A sly puss!" exclaimed the Colonel, and well he might; though, for ourselves, we confess that, with all Nelly's demureness, we had had misgivings about her, from seeing how she at times appropriated Jane's very sauciest looks and tones; and also from seeing the very spirit of fun sparkling out of those clear hazel eyes of hers, on various occasions.

How the Colonel laughed and guffaw'd! how Nelly blushed to the very tips of her ears! how they all jested and waxed impatient to learn the title and the plot of this novel of hers!

"But what is a novel without love in it?" exclaimed the Colonel, hypothetically; "and there *can* be nothing of it, for the child Nelly knows nothing about love."

"A—hem!" came from Captain Harry, impudently; for which indiscretion Jane frowned at him.

There was no retreat for Ellen. The Colonel vowed the manuscript should be produced, and read aloud. They would sit in solemn conclave,

and decide upon its merits ; and if it was good, it should be published. Mr. Abney should read it aloud : his fine voice would do it every justice ; but, for his own part, he could not think what the sly puss *could* pick up, or invent, to write about.

So that evening, when all were cosily settled in the drawing-room, the Colonel called for the manuscript, which Nelly, with laughing shamefacedness, placed before Mr. Abney. A good legible hand did she write, so he could read on without difficulty. The ladies (excepting Jane, who was sitting hand in hand with Captain Harry) betook themselves to their needlework. The Colonel placed himself in an attitude of rigid attention, evidently prepared to play the part of critic ; he gave a laughing fling at the pair of turtles in the corner, and bade Mr. Abney commence.

* * * *

“ Very good, very good indeed, Nelly, my girl,” said the Colonel, with much emphasis, at the close of the first evening’s reading. “ I see now where you find your subject-matter. You just rake together the little every-day things people say and do ; you fix the delicate lights and shades ; you don’t affect much incident : you mean us to fix our eyes

on character instead ; and you do not give us demigods and goddesses, but men and women. I think, my love, you have written a sensible book. I was a little curious to see how you steered through the Scylla and Charybdis of love-making ; but I find you avoid it altogether."

" I am sure, Nelly, you must lighten it up with some of the tender passion," cried Jane. " The publishers won't look at it without plenty of love in it."

Demure was Nelly's aspect.

" Perhaps your sister will kindly write the love passages for you," said the Colonel, spitefully, " as your own palate is too unsophisticated for the condiment."

Half a volume did they get through each evening, and still the commendations continued, and Nelly looked mightily gratified. Lavish in praise was the Colonel, suggesting now and then a little alteration, or the erasing or reconstruction of a sentence ; but more, it seemed, by way of doing justice to his position, as *the* censor, than from any necessity for such ; but at length he suddenly dashed in,—

" Come, come, Miss Nelly, I have a question or two to put to you about this dainty confection of yours. I find we have plunged into

the very meridian of love, all at once, with a variety of melting speeches, proposals, refusals, acceptances, and such like; and very good it is—nothing mawkish or twaddlesome: you make love very respectably indeed, my dear. But, Miss Nelly, what can *you* know about such things? where have you learned it? how got it?"

Keen as a merlin pursuing a partridge did look: and wofully embarrassed was Nelly. She gave him a sort of oeilad, which comprised both the Captain and Mr. Abney, beseeching, entreating that he would not put *such* questions before them; but not a rush did the remorseless Colonel care: he had got upon the scent, and meant to run the quarry down. One inquiry followed another in the most searching and inquisitorial fashion, till the whole party was well-nigh convulsed with laughter, and poor Nelly was blundering and stammering out answers the most confused, to his pitiless cross-questioning.

She at length grew desperate, and turned at bay.

"I tell you what it was, Papa, that taught me how to write about such matters. It was nothing but instinct. Every woman *must* know how proposals are made and received."

"Must she, indeed? You think they are all stereotype, do you, Miss Nelly; but I beg leave to tell you that it is a mistake. No two men feel, or make love alike. There are not many set about it in the elegant fashion your hero does; and now fetch the dictionary, that we may get the precise definition of this word 'instinct,' which you talk about, before we go any further.—Um—ha—I see, 'natural desire or aversion.' So, Dame Nature instructed you, did she, my Nelly? Well, I shall keep a keen eye upon you, with such an admirable instructress. You have too pretty a way of love-making to be trusted out of my sight."

Most provoking was he, and Nelly's face burned like fire.

—The novel was listened to with unabated interest to the very last; all praised it, and the Colonel as much as any.

"It does you infinite credit, Nelly, my girl," he said, "it is a downright pleasant novel, and you have evoked a very agreeable set of characters, breathed the breath of life into some nice, honest, hearty creatures; a *leetle* too good, perhaps, but let that pass. I am the more pleased with you, because I don't think you have neglected one of your duties in order to write it; never missed my

slippers, or newspaper; or forgotten any of my requirements; and have never been seen with inky fingers." (Nelly rose from her chair to throw her arms round his neck, and give him such a hearty kiss.) "And now, my darling, what publisher will you have? Of course it is an article of sale."

"You mean to ask, Papa, what publisher will take it, don't you?"

"I don't know. I should think any would be glad of such a work to bring out; but fetch the *Athenæum*, and we will look over their names."

As the best way of deciding, the names of the great publishing firms were written on separate slips of paper, and mingled together; then Mabel was asked to draw one out, which she did, and read, "Messrs. Younger, Older & Co."

That decided it. To them was the manuscript to be forwarded; "and it should go the very next day," said the Colonel.

"If they will only give me fifty pounds for it," exclaimed Nelly, with such a beaming face, "how proud I shall be! What *must* I do with the money?"

"We'll say nothing to Marcet about it till it's out, and a splendidly bound copy shall be

his first intimation. What will the boy say to his pet child, as he used to call you, writing a novel, and a good one?"

Mightily pleased looked the Colonel, but he could *not* refrain from teasing Nelly about her "instincts," bringing the colour to her cheek continually, with references to it.

A great favourite did Mr. Abney become with them during his stay at the Manor. The quiet routine they had dropped into was favourable to the opening out of his most unassuming character, and tone of mind. Serious, tranquil, yet earnest, "to honour all men" seemed native to him. A soul full of feeling, breathing out none save kindly emotions, yet in itself reposing on such high, fixed principle, as made it steadfast as a rock. Wonderfully free from all display, never caring to talk if others wished to do so, yet was there about his own conversation an inexpressible charm, that never failed to carry his hearers with him. Quiet his manner, very quiet his words; yet the cheek glowed, the eye kindled under them.

It was the evening before he left the Manor, that the Colonel proposed that he should give them a reading from Shakspeare.

"Most willingly will I do so." He com-

menced with portions of the "Merchant of Venice," then turned to the wise sayings of the ancient Dogberry.

The Colonel, who had been napping a little at intervals, roused up, and requested something sentimental, some tender nonsense or other, for the edification and delectation of the two whispering lovers in the corner. He gave the love scene in the second act of "Romeo and Juliet." The Colonel ceased to doze, Jane and Harry to whisper, Mabel and Ellen put down their embroidery, that they might the better listen to that most exquisite reading; not alone was there the charm of purest accent, clearest, yet softest tone; but the intense feeling breathed into it riveted the ear, and its low deep cadence sank into the heart, which vibrated under its power; kinship you felt with love, young and passionate; you were linked into it by the bonds of a common humanity; which, showing you to yourself, taught you what you were—what you might be.

With the most rapt attention did Mabel listen; as he repeated the concluding lines—

"Sleep dwelt upon thine eyes, peace in thy breast—
Would I were sleep and peace so sweet to rest;"

his eyes were upraised from the book, and met her full gaze fixed on him, with all that

vivified feeling pictured in it; instantly did her eyes veil, fall under the burning light which filled his glance.

"Thank you, Philip Abney, thank you; why man, there's no end to your gifts. I am afraid," added the Colonel, jocularly, "that any lady you were playing Romeo to, would have but a very slender chance of resistance, if you brought the battery of that voice of yours against her; it's enough to wile the bird from the tree."

Paternally did the Colonel seem to feel towards him; again and again bidding him make the Manor his home, whenever he liked,—he would bring his welcome with him always.

"If at any time I can serve you, Philip, apply to me at once. You will take my esteem with you wherever you go; my warm good-will."

And so he quietly bade them all farewell.

"I do like Philip *so* much," said Mabel to her Aunt; "how I wish I had a brother like him!" she added, with a little sigh.

There were dinner-guests one day from Atherton, (the borough where Philip's ministerial duties had lain,) amongst them was a Mr. Mildmay, who was so oblivious, or so unknowing, as to offer his arm to take Miss

Vallancey in to dinner, greatly to the Captain's discomfiture, and Jane's too. The Colonel soon spied out the state of matters, and vastly enjoyed the jest, looking at them both; with a very quizzical smile. Much too good-tempered and well-bred was Harry, to exhibit any annoyance; and fortunately he was so placed that he could look at her, and catch her look all the time; to be sure, he could not help seeing that Mr. Mildmay was most assiduous in his attentions to her, but, of course, every one must admire Jane; so he watched it with tolerable equanimity, though Mr. Mildmay *was* a young and agreeable man.

The guests spoke much of Philip Abney—warmly in his praise. 'Twas a golden opportunity for Mrs. Abney to learn all about her nephew, and they were as ready to tell as she to listen and inquire; so she heard all about the costly service of plate which he had declined to accept from the parishioners; also of his refusing to give them a farewell sermon, from accidentally learning that it was meant to make it an opportunity for demonstrating the general esteem and attachment to him.

"I was with him when he left the town," said Mr. Mildmay, "and I certainly never witnessed such a scene; it seemed that well

nigh all the inhabitants were lining the streets, waiting to see him pass. The men stood bare-headed; and from every side came, 'God bless you, Sir! God bless you!' He smiled and bowed to them, as long as he could command his composure, but was at last fairly overcome. His parting words to myself and others, were an earnest request that we would do all we could to calm down the excited feeling; he asked it as a mark of good-will to himself. Nobly he behaved, for never man had such outrageous calumnies, and insults heaped upon his head as he had."

Uncomfortably had the Colonel's mouth been twitching during the recital; at its close, he said—

"He's a downright noble soldierly fellow; true to his colours and his King—is he not, Captain Malcolm?"

"He does, indeed, seem to be. I suppose it is nobler to forgive injury and insult than to resent them."

"And much harder; but, you see he was obedient to the rules of the service in which he was enrolled."

Reproachful was the look Captain Harry gave Jane, as he held the door for the ladies to pass out, and penitent, indeed, was hers, and

pardon-pleading for her involuntary fault: he did not fail, when he secured his fitting place beside her in the drawing-room, to give a little lecture upon the proprieties to be observed in an engagement; to which Jane listened with all becoming meekness. But, lo! in the midst of it, Mr. Mildmay bustled up to hand her to the instrument; and Harry looked downright angry. The Colonel had something to do to smother his laughter at the *contretems*, and the Captain's haughty indignant glance. —

They were now waxing impatient to receive an answer from the Messrs. Younger, Older & Co. as to the fate of Nelly's novel, though not one of them held a doubt respecting the tenor of it. There could not be a question that she would have very handsome terms offered for it. Jane had a pretty wager with her *engagé* about it; none but themselves exactly understood how it lay, but the Captain was observed to take a pretty bracelet from her arm, and a sweet kiss from her lips, as sureties of her good faith in the matter, though he shortly after gave her *one* of her pledges back again, whispering something the while which brought one of Jane's vividest blushes to her cheek.

The looked-for response came at length.

Nervously did Nelly tear the envelope—with quick, eager eye, scan the contents. All watched her face to catch the glow of exultation which must needs follow: but, instead, gathered a look of most painful surprise.

She glanced at the Colonel—almost were the tears standing in her eyes.

“They won’t have it, Papa!”

“Why bless me, Nelly! how can that be? What do they say?”

She read out the unwelcome missive, which politely declined her MS. on the ground of its lack of striking, startling incident.

“Well, Papa,” said Nelly, heaving a great sigh, and looking thoroughly downcast, “it must come back again, and take up its abode in Noah’s Ark.”

Be it known, that Noah’s Ark was an ancient, carved, almost mysterious-looking oak chest, of immense size, standing in what had been the two girls’ school-room—was now their painting-room, work-room, and, doubtless, Nelly’s novel-writing-room. The Ark was a household repertory; everything that was wanted, came out—everything that was not wanted, went in. Endless were the jests afloat respecting it. Scarce a letter did Marcet pen without some playful allusion to

Noah's Ark. Many a wild frolic had he indulged with Jane and Ellen, in which the ancient chest had played a silent, but important part—either to furnish a hiding-place for the joyous creatures, or to yield up from its resources, (that were never known to fail) a wonderful variety of grotesque costumes for masquerading freaks, and strangest metamorphoses, *in* which the boy especially delighted, and *at* which the Colonel in vain tried to look austere, and fashion the lines in his forehead into a disapproving frown. Certain was the matter to end in an explosion of laughter from them all.

It was the day before Marcet left home to join his regiment, then on the point of embarking for India, that he stood with his two sisters, looking into the Ark, and its many reminiscences of their childish days, in the shape of school-books, copy-books, drawing-books, bats, balls, and skipping-ropes. In one corner peeped out the mane of Marcet's rocking-horse—now, he sat his horse like a Centaur. In another place, were his fishing-rod and skates, curiously intermingled with Latin, and Greek exercises, and comical caricatures. They took up a most graceless one—a pen-and-ink sketch of his tutor, the

Rev. Dr. Mathew, depicted as 'Paulet eating apple pudding.' Merrily they laughed at it, and Marcet declared himself utterly ashamed of himself."

They looked at other funny things, and laughed, and talked, and still lingered over the Ark, till, all at once, Jane and Ellen, whose voices had been getting an odd sound with them, began to weep.

"Have done, have done, girls! Do you wish to make a milk-sop of me?" Marcet asked, in a scolding voice, whilst an arm passed round each, and he drew them close in a loving embrace.

"Now, Jane—now, Ellen, you must listen to what I have to say; and remember that it is to be stored up in those good hearts of yours—not forgotten as soon as my back is turned. Do you hear, girls?"

Jane answered him with a kiss; while Ellen's tears fell fast on the arm and hand which held her tightly to him.

"It is this. I shall come back—I know I shall, to love you better even than I do now—fondle and fuss you more, for two of the best girls in England. This, I feel assured—quite assured of; but——"

His tone changed.

“ We must look possibilities in the face—*I may not come back*. I may fill a soldier’s grave out there—pray God I may fall doing my duty—as many a gallant fellow *will* do. Should this be so—(don’t cry so, girls, you’ll drive me distracted), remember that I leave our father to you both—not to one, but both. I *may* have no time to write you a word of farewell, or express one last wish ; so I tell you *now* what I should care for *most*, if I were lying with my death-wound. It would be *him*—never let him feel my loss ! This is what I had to say, girls ; and I have said it ; and let it abide in your hearts as long as you live. See which of you can make the best Cordelia. Come now, cheer up ! ”

Long did the three stand resting in that loving embrace ; and Marcet took a long tress from each fair head jokingly, and told them “ On no account to fall in love till he came back, to see whether the fellows were worthy of being cared for by such dear, good girls, as *his* Jane and Nelly.”

So the smiles mantled, before the tears were dried.

Noah’s Ark had never yet had a MS. novel entrusted to its keeping, but the time had *now*

come, said Nelly; though this the Colonel would not hear of.

"Bah! nonsense! It *shall* not go in. Why, what a thin-skinned creature you are, and what a faint heart you have got. Rouse up the soldierliness in you, child, and stand to your arms."

"I haven't got any, Papa."

All the spirit seemed taken out of Nelly; but the Colonel scolded and teased her into something approaching self-appreciation again. The matter ended by another reference to the *Athenæum*, another writing of publishers' names, and another drawing out by Mabel.

This time the lot fell upon Messrs. Milburn & Co.

"Don't destroy the others," said the Colonel, significantly; "we shall probably go the round of them."

"*We never will*, Papa. Noah's Ark first," returned Nelly, spiritedly.

"Noah's Ark must be last, you simple child."

One thing they were all assured of, that merit, was not what publishers wanted, else Nelly's book would not have been rejected.

"We must keep in mind," observed the Colonel, who was able as most men to see both sides of a question, "publishers don't form the taste, they only *conform* to it. But all this wise preaching does not, you see, reconcile our budding authoress to her disappointment; she is still pouting and sighing. Come, cheer up, my lassie; go on writing, and never fear that your work will be thrown away."

"—— When are we to get you back, Mabel Somers?" wrote Lillas—"have you at home? We, and indeed, all your people, are waxing impatient for your bodily presence amongst us once again. Seriously, I have sadly needed you to help me receive my governess; whom Charles read me such lectures upon, as regarded consideration, and so forth, (I believe he had primed himself with Mrs. Ellis beforehand) that I got absolutely nervous, and but for its savouring of caprice, should have deferred her coming till your return; however, I got through the reception pretty well, as she did also. She is very nice-looking, with a rich coming and going colour; abundant silky light curls; good eyes, &c.; very tolerable figure and deportment; reserved in manner; and looks delicate—*too delicate* for a governess, I fear. She bears a most alarming name, fitter

for a heroine of romance or tragedy-queen than for a simple, well-bred, common-sense lady, come to train our children, and be one of us. *Miss Lancaster* is all very well; but Leonora Lancaster is, you will agree with me, downright appalling.

“We have had numerous visitors since our return from the coast; and last week came our pleasant Trent acquaintance, the Hon. Mr. Barry. I find he is a near connexion of our friends, the Maynards of Bristow Park; he has been all this time in Rome with his mother and sisters, and has returned now for the Parliamentary Session. He inquired with much politeness after you and *tante*, and *very tenderly* after the *femme-de-chambre*. What a laugh I had with him about that solemn dog, and your luckless Griffiths.

“You will be pleased to hear that Dr. Meridan thinks he shall be able to remove Margaret Fisher’s lameness; in fact, reinstate her health. I called upon her the other day and found her drawing. Ah! Mabel, — Mabel, always beforehand with me in active kindness; you do it whilst I am thinking about it. She looks quite changed; happy, almost, with the hope the Doctor gives her.

“Very fast is the Memorial rising now;

every one says, it will be a most beautiful and tasteful building. The Gearys called this morning. Very anxious does the Rector seem to know more of your reverend cousin, and said something about inviting him to the Rectory; but I told him—was I not right?—that I believed he was coming as your guest to Beechwood by-and-by.

“Fairly overwhelmed am I with messages from the children; little Goldenlocks (who is blooming and dancing again) with her sweetest love and thousand, thousand kisses to *her* Mabel, bids her come home very soon, and bring many pretty stories with her,—of which she has *of course*, written one every day, as she bade her do. What revelations she made to Mr. Barry about cousin Mabel, I cannot tell; but I heard your name frequently on her lips, as she sat on his knee after dinner, discussing *bonbons*; to judge from the amused smile on his fine face, he was gaining a tolerably clear insight into cousin Mabel’s life at home. Did I tell you he was coming into the neighbourhood again in the spring? My august spouse engaged him to dinner, let the time be when it might; which I call marvellous condescension from *him*.

“How I should enjoy hearing the dear,

sparkling Colonel, tease Jane and the Captain; and how I should like to help him—do not, **I** pray, tell *that* to Jane—'twould be just in my own way—delicious. Bring them all back with you if you can, that I may share in the fun. Well can I imagine the exuberant mirth it must call forth from the rest of you.

“ Charles bids me say, that he is awaiting your summons to the Manor to escort you back; when is he to come? ‘When does *she* come home again?’ is daily heard amongst us. I must end; for not only have I indulged in more than sufficient *enfantillage*, but I also see a carriage driving up the avenue. Love to *ma tante* Abney, (does *she* join the Colonel in teasing the enamoured Jane?) and loving love, exceeding, and bountiful, to your own self from every one of us.

“ Believe me, dear Mabel Somers, my sweet sister, playfellow, and friend,

“ Always yours,

“ LILIAS.”

CHAPTER IV.

"For some so goodly gracious are by kind,
That every action doth them much commend,
And in the eies of men great liking find."

Faerie Queen.

SPRING was advancing. The warm russet hue, tinting lime and pollard-willow shoots, was contrasting with the brightening green of field and meadow; the pendent tassels of the hazel were sprinkling the ground with a golden shower; and the white eggs of the lone wood-pigeon were gleaming through the chinks of her slight-built nest, ere Mabel and Mrs. Abney were on the move to leave the Manor.

It was the evening previous to their departure, that all (including Mr. Ferrand, who had come to escort them back, and of course, Captain Malcolm) were assembled in the drawing-room. The Colonel's face always wore its blandest, most benignant expression towards the close of the day, as if it were not possible *then* to ruffle his plumage. Ellen, at his request, was looking out a passage in the Times to show to Mr. Ferrand: that found, then she must see

for his glasses, then bring him a plate of almond biscuits, which had been left at the dessert (a great *penchant* had the Colonel for sweet things)—then a cup of coffee.

“Was there anything else for dear Pa?”

“I think not; Nell, my good little girl, that is hands and eyes and feet to me, that almost knows what I want, without my telling her.” He peered over his glasses at her. “There *is* something else, Nell. Give my love to Jane and Harry, and inquire what they are whispering about?” Many were the laughing rebukes he administered to that enamoured pair for their absorb’dness; with very little effect it is true. Ellen placed herself prominently, did all she could to cover Jane’s absence of mind and forgetfulness, but too keen an observer was the Colonel not to see it all. He said he must fain consent to Jane’s marriage taking place in June, the day she was of age in fact, for he sadly wanted to find his daughter again. At present she was so entirely taken up with Harry, that she had neither eyes, ears, nor tongue for any one else, so he should let her be married to cure her of that extremity of love. “Love will grow with what it feeds on,” said Harry, boldly. “Marriage is an antidote to this excessive abstrac-

tion nevertheless," returned the Colonel, "by the time you have been married three months you will be quite a rational, sensible pair, which you really are not now."

"And now, Miss Nelly, I have something to say to you, so stand up before me, and listen with all your ears, in presence of this goodly company."

She placed herself before him, with a smile ready to break out, "I give you fair warning, Miss Ellen Vallancey, of my intention to mount a small brass cannon on a swivel at the top of this, the Manor House. It will turn to every point of the compass, and shall be pointed at any wooer that may present himself. You must stay with ~~me~~, my girl, for I cannot spare you; you may write novels if you like, with not *too* much lovemaking in though, let the *instincts* be what they may. So remember there is to be nothing but 'no, no,' to any suitor whatever."

The smile deepened with Ellen as she stood till he had concluded, and then she audaciously laughed in his face, but leaned towards him, and whispered something which made him laugh in return, pinch her cheek, and call her "good child—good Nelly."

—— A high holiday for the children was the

day of return to Beechwood, for—"Mabel was coming home"—once and again was it heard called throughout the house in very *crescendo* fashion, "that Mabel was coming home;" and she did come, and all three were in her arms at once, encircled bodily as she kneeled down upon the marble floor of the vestibule, pouring out such fond caressing names, kissing and being kissed all the while; indeed little Golden-Locks never ceased kissing her fur cloak, till they reached the drawing-room, where sat Miss Lancaster looking pretty enough in all conscience, but with a shy, uncomfortable expression, as if she alone felt an alien and stranger amid that happy meeting of friends. But the reserve soon passed away under the influence of Mabel's extended hand and pleasant smiles; ere the first evening had gone by, they were talking unrestrainedly together.

Much merriment was excited by bright Maud's most zealous kissing, and equally persistent whispering in Mabel's ear, who was at length called upon to divulge what it was all about? And lo! it related to those pretty stories which *were* to have been written, but which had not been, and about which the tender child was well nigh ready to weep with disappointment.

— Now that they were once more settled at home again, Mabel entered upon her duties with her people; regular became her visits to Somerton; not merely to the cottages of the poor did she go, to those whom she could befriend and benefit, but frequent were her calls upon the large occupiers of her lands, the tenants of her broad acres; that she herself might be well known to them, and they to her; graciously and gracefully did she deport herself; warmly was she welcomed in their homes; mutual interest sprung quickly up. How could it be otherwise, under the pleasant influence of the cheerful, friendly conversations she held with them under their own roof-tree; all their domestic events she sought to be acquainted with, all their family chroniclings. Was there sickness in a household, soon was her carriage at the door, and she herself making personal inquiries in kindest phrase, and with readiest sympathy. Was there a marriage to take place, her congratulations were not the last, nor were they unaccompanied by some substantial mark of good will to the bride.

Soon a feeling of unbounded attachment arose to her amongst her people. She was their own; a true Somers, worthy of her

father. So sweet-natured, and good, and beautiful; yet so alone—so very lone-like, without father or mother, brother or sister, to support and cherish her. Something of devotion mingled in their love to her on this account. The labouring men would stop in their homely toil abroad in the fields, to gaze after her, when they saw her carriage passing, and would say,

“There’s our young lady driving by; bless her for her pleasant ways and smiles; there’s not one of us too lowly for her to notice and pay regard to.”

In truth, her whole heart was yearning to fulfil her mission to the uttermost. “Fail not to do good; you will have much in your power; *so fail not*, most dear daughter of my heart,” seemed graven on her mind, as with a pen of adamant. Yes, *his* altar was raised in her soul, and on it she piled votive offerings of love and life; daily, hourly did she offer them up—will and deed, act and intention, unbidden thought, unspoken speech, were all *his* in heaven. “What wouldst thou have me to do, my father? do it I will, and that instantly,” was her soul’s language.

Both frequent and satisfactory did Mr.

Dysart's letters continue to be ; Mr. Geary, before whom they were all laid, was quite prepossessed in his favour, and at length wrote him a cordial invitation to the Rectory, which he as cordially accepted, and in the beginning of April he arrived at Somerton. After a week's stay with Mr. Geary, he was to come to Beechwood, and be Mabel's guest for a time.

Both her guardians had duly impressed upon Mabel the necessity for requiring a distinct pledge from her cousin, relative to his Tractarian views having been entirely given up ; and also that there should not *at any time* be any adoption of the histrionic practices of the Tractarians in the services of Somerton Church. From that party he distinctly stated he had now dissevered himself, and warmly and earnestly thanked Mabel for setting him upon such a rigid examination and scrutiny of doctrine and belief, as unmistakeably showed how involved in error he had been.

"This is all very well, my dear," observed the Colonel ; "but you *must* guard against his relapsing into error ; such things do happen at times. It would ill become one honourable man to doubt the simple word of another honourable man, but it *is* said (God grant us pardon, if it is unjust !) that with the Roman-

ists and Puseyites, the *priest* may do what in the man is wholly scandalous. Make sure of your reverend cousin—make sure.”

Mabel wrote accordingly.

A little tone of *persiflage* ran through his reply; many, the playful allusions in it, to his fair cousin being his warder and conscience-keeper. For the grave matter that had occupied her thoughts, he would leave the discussion of it till he could fully discuss it with herself and Mr. Geary at Somerton.

Mr. Dysart arrived at the Rectory at the latter end of the week, and on the Sabbath officiated in the services. Greatly struck were the people by his exceedingly handsome and imposing appearance, by his eloquence, fine solemn voice, and reading. He visited the schools, and gathered golden opinions from teachers and pupils alike, by his urbane, affable address, and gentlemanly bearing. In the course of a few days, he had won the good will and the suffrage of all; on every side was the wish expressed that the impressive, handsome young clergyman, who was so pleasant-spoken and so free, might be appointed to the living; they were sure their young lady could not meet with one *they* should like better; or who would be a more

powerful preacher, or a greater blessing to the parish."

Mabel was very gratified to find he had made so favourable an impression. She felt that it would have placed her in a most painful, and embarrassing position with Sir James to have anything come in the way of her cousin's presentation to Somerton.

"*Veni, vidi, vici*, must be your motto, dear cousin," she said laughingly to him. "You have but to appear, and you win all my people's suffrages at once. We have now only to bind you down—fetter you beyond all possibility of change—ere we acknowledge ourselves subjects of your spiritual supremacy. When are you prepared to take the vows?"

As gay and laughing was his reply, as her question had been.

All save Lilies were out of doors, strolling about the grounds, on a fine breezy morning of March; searching for violets were the children, blue and white violets, which were suspected to be hiding themselves on sundry mossy banks nigh to: nay it was more than suspected, their sweet breath betrayed them.

"Arn't they quite *deleecious*?" asked Maud, as she brought some in her hand; her sweet face buried amongst them. "Arn't they

deleecious?” she asked again, with such a prolongation of the word, that all ungraciously laughed.

“ You should say ‘ delicious,’ not ‘ deleecious,’ ” put in Miss Ethelle, with a setting-right sort of air, and glance towards Miss Lancaster.

“ Find us some more, darling,” said Mabel, as she drew her towards her to kiss away the pain of the laugh, and the correction too; for the tender one seemed quite abashed.

As she lifted her head from kissing the child, her eye rested on Miss Lancaster’s face—she was seated opposite to her, on a low rustic seat—rested on, but was riveted by its extraordinary paleness; changeful it always was, but there was not now a shade of colour to be seen; her eyes were dilated and fixed rigidly upon some one or something approaching. It was but for an instant; even before Mabel had time to ask if she were ill, the frightened blood poured back to cheek and lip, and an expression of intolerable anguish flitted over her face.

“ I rejoice to see you out enjoying this lovely spring day,” said a fine, deep voice, proceeding from some one behind Mabel. She turned hastily to the speaker, who was no other

than her cousin Rivers,—his step all unheard on the rich green sward.—Cordially she greeted him, as did Mrs. Abney; and then Mabel introduced him to Miss Lancaster. His gentlemanly and courteous acknowledgment of the introduction was a marked contrast to that young lady's look of scornful *hauteur*, as, by the very slightest bend of the head, she evinced her sense of his presence. An extraordinary change had come over her usually reserved aspect; something most disdainful was in her eye and look; but she quickly challenged the children to a stricter search for violets, and departed with them.

“Are you listening to the wee birds' singing, dear Mabel?” her cousin asked, as he drew her arm in his, and proceeded to tell her that Mrs. Ferrand had sent him out into the grounds to find the party, and request their presence in the drawing-room, where were some callers waiting to see them. He himself had come a regretful messenger from the Rectory, the bearer of apologies and excuses. Mr. Geary was not quite well, had taken cold, in short; Mrs. Geary would not leave him, so they were unable to fulfil their engagement to dine at Beechwood on that day. He himself would be the sole representative of the party.

"I am so sorry; I think I will ride back with you, and express my regrets in person," said Mabel.

"Oh, do: it is a charming day for a ride."

"Shall you have sufficient time?" asked Mrs. Abney, looking at her watch; "it is now three o'clock."

"We will ride quickly, Aunt. Hassan will be delighted to get a good gallop."

They moved quickly towards the house, that Mabel might get her riding-habit on. Standing at the hall-door was an open carriage, which reminded them that they were wanted in the drawing-room. Mabel's arm was still in her cousin's, as she entered. A party of callers was seated chatting with Lillas, one of whom, a gentleman, rose, and approached them.

Gaily did Lillas tell him, that she would not aid him in the least to make himself known.

"It would be simply presumptuous in me, Mrs. Ferrand, to hope to be remembered," was said with a smile which both Mabel and her aunt knew again at once.

'Twas he of the stately step and fine dark eyes, whom they had met at Trent. Scarcely was the Hon. Mr. Barry one of the neutral-tinted people to be forgotten again quickly,

Frank and unreserved was the mutual greeting, and lively the chat which ensued. Mabel was very animated, and looking exquisitely fresh and lovely with the rich bloom she wore, and the fulness of happy light beaming out from her starry eyes. Radiant in youth and grace, and dimpling smiles, was she now.

She altogether forgot her engagement to ride with her cousin, till gently reminded by him that the horses were waiting.

"I beg your pardon, Cousin," she said, colouring slightly: "I will not detain you many minutes longer." And turned to offer her apologies to Mr. Barry for her abrupt departure, but was stopped by Lillas saying that Mr. Barry and his friends, the Maynards, had engaged to return to dinner,—to come *sans* ceremony.

Soon was Mabel equipped in her black riding-dress and plumed gipsy. She found the party assembled on the lawn, admiring her beautiful Hassan, whom the groom was leading up and down. One foot on her cousin's hand, and she sprang gracefully into the saddle. The spirited creature caracoled and pranced gaily with his dainty burden.

"Is your noble Arabian quite safe-tem-

per'd, Miss Somers?" asked Mr. Barry, standing beside her.

"I could guide him with a silken string," she said, caressing his proud neck with her ungloved hand. The most refined coquetry could not have suggested a more effective contrast to the fair white hand, than the glossy sable coat.

"Does he not seem pleased when I pat him? But I must not stay talking: my cousin is impatient. I am coming—I am coming. There, now I have dropped my glove. Many thanks to you. Farewell. Do not forget to tell me, this evening, how that funny dog, Jerome St. Bernard, is."

"Pray God I am not too late!" said the Hon. Mr. Barry to himself, as he stood gazing after them. "Yet who *can* that handsome fellow be?"

CHAPTER V.

"Thou art an old Lovemonger, and speak'st skilfully."

SHAKESPEARE.

ALL were assembled again in the drawing-room at Beechwood, at seven ; but Mabel and her cousin had not returned. It was unlike her to be unpunctual ; and Mrs. Abney grew uneasy. At half-past seven, Mr. Ferrand gave orders for the coachman to take the swiftest horse in the stable, and ride towards Somerton.

Miss Somers's own most trustworthy servant, Andrews, was with her, so it was hoped nothing was wrong.

Conversation languished ; and the gentlemen took their hats, and walked up the avenue.

"Was *that* the sound of horses' feet?" asked Mr. Barry, stopping to listen.

"No—yes—there it was again ; the ringing sound of three or four horses at full speed."

"There can be no mistake now, I think !" said Charles, "we may as well return to the house."

They had not reached it, when the riding

party galloped past them ; and on arriving at the hall door, they found Mabel off her horse, and undergoing a scolding from Mrs. Abney, who had been trembling with fear and apprehension for her safety.

"Pray do forgive me, dear Aunt," was she saying, coaxingly to her, as they entered.

"If Mrs. Abney forgives you, I do not know that I shall, Miss Somers," said Charles, coldly, and looking really displeased.

"Nay, if all are going to scold you in that way, I must take the whole burden of the fault upon myself," put in Mr. Dysart.

"Peccavi, cousin Charles, and dear *tante*, I will tell you all about it ; but do not let me keep you waiting dinner ; I will dress and join you at table."

In as short a time as possible, she entered the drawing-room, again leaning on her cousin's arm ; he had waited for her ; her colour was heightened, and there was a pretty culprit-like air about her, as she offered her apologies to Lilius.

"We will put you upon your defence, and hear what you have to advance as soon as dinner is over," said Lilius.

Directly opposite to Mabel and her cousin, at table, sat Mr. Barry, with a most tiresome

épergne between them ; though it but little mattered, for the young clergyman claimed her whole attention ; all his native power of pleasing was exerted ; never had she seen him so *suave* ; so perfectly agreeable : he was speaking of the natural beauty of Somerton—of its exquisite order, its admirable schools ; its apostolic minister ; each theme was dear to her heart that he touched on ; and her attention was quite engrossed. They had just made an engagement to ride together in the morning : when the dessert came on, the children in ; and Lillas called upon her for her defence.

“ Why Lillas, we just rode there.”

“ Did you linger on the way ? ”

“ No, we rode quickly ; and I sat a little time with Mr. Geary, who is not so very poorly after all ; then whilst cousin Rivers dressed, I went to chat with widow Collins, and she got speaking about Ruth, and about her husband ; and one thing or other, that I quite forgot the time. That is the whole truth, and I hope everybody will forgive me keeping them waiting dinner, Cousin Charles included,” she added, throwing him a saucy look, as he listened with a judicial sort of air to her defence.

“ I may, perhaps, as cousin Charles : but

whether I shall overlook it in my capacity of guardian, is another matter. There is a sort of gipsyism about Miss Somers, ladies and gentlemen, which I fear I shall be called upon to coerce; she is *always* out of doors. I believe there is not a wood, a glen, strath, stream, or even pretty field within a circuit of six miles of us, but she has a familiar acquaintance with; not a mere 'How do you do' recognition, but absolute intimacy. As long as this remained in any sort of bounds, I was content not to see it, or interfere with her roaming abroad; but when the *furor* arrives at the pitch it has now done—keeping a dozen hungry people waiting dinner a full hour by its indulgence, I am sure you will all agree with me, that it is time to act; so Miss Somers, I beg to inform you that this nomadic sort of life must be restrained from henceforth."

Laughing, blushing, pouting, looking playful defiance, was Mabel all the time he spoke.

"I must remind you that none are permitted to infringe upon the liberty of the subject, cousin Charles."

"Will you, Mabel, bear *that* in mind, in your dealings with me?" asked he who sat beside her, in a low significant tone; "think how completely I am in your leading-strings;

you are the sovereign, I the subject, the serf and slave; so remember your own caution!"

"Ah! it does not apply to you, Rivers, in the least; for I have exacted nothing from you yet; I shall become a tyrannical taskmistress by-and-by, I promise you," she said, with a smile, and turned to answer Mr. Maynard, who was addressing her.

"I sometimes hold you up as an example, Miss Somers, in regard to taking due exercise. I never meet any lady so constantly in the open air as yourself."

"I am afraid I do lead a very wandering sort of life, vagrant almost; but I have such an unsatisfiable love of sunshine and fresh breezes, that I *cannot* keep in doors."

"Have you much fine scenery in the neighbourhood?" asked Mr. Barry, from across the table.

"Not exactly *fine* scenery; but there are very pretty walks and drives to tempt people into exercise."

"Has my little Maud been the best of all good children, to-day?" she asked whisperingly of the child, as she stood at her knee.

With a clouded face she told that Miss Lancaster had pronounced her for that day, not good, but naughty.

"Well, my Maud, then there have been two naughty girls ; for do you know they say I have been naughty also ; so we must comfort each other."

She laughed as she caught Mr. Barry's eye fixed upon her, and saw, from the expression of his smile, that he had overheard the whispering.

"What *has* become of Miss Lancaster to-night, Lilius ?" she asked, when they reached the drawing-room.

"She has a severe headache, and declined joining us."

Mrs. Maynard, a lively gossiping lady as need to be, was discoursing at great length, as the Bristow Park party drove home, upon the marriage engagement which existed between Miss Somers and her cousin, Mr. Dysart, which engagement Mr. Maynard said "He would not believe *did* exist."

"It is a fact, nevertheless, George, for Miss Somers's maid, Griffiths, told mine—under the seal of secrecy, of course—all about the affair ; it was arranged when they were staying at Northcote in the autumn ; the servants heard it talked over between Sir James and them. Griffiths said that Miss Somers came to her dressing-room perfectly bathed in tears ;

she could not imagine what had occurred, till they told her in the servants'-hall."

"Well, but ladies don't receive proposals bathed in tears, do they? Besides, I never, for one, believe anything coming through the channel of servants."

"But this was all overheard, you know. Besides, Griffiths states that the two have corresponded regularly ever since."

"I shall give Miss Somers a hint about her Griffiths," said Mr. Maynard.

"Then, his manner is quite confirmatory; constantly I heard him say 'we, we,' when speaking to her of Somerton, and you must both have noticed how long he was conversing with her in an undertone, and how he held her hand, and kissed it, when he said 'Good night!' I feel quite sure it is a settled thing. They will make a very handsome pair; will they not, Mr. Barry?"

"Very, indeed," he replied.

"I am not at all convinced, Julia; they do not look to me in the least like an engaged pair: there is no embarrassment or shyness whatever; indeed she seems most perfectly at her ease. No, no, take my word for it, he is no *amoroso* of hers; and I should say, Cupid protect her from him, if he were."

"Remember how easy and smiling Miss Somers's manner is at all times. It is not every one who is shy in love matters."

"Well, well, I ought to know a little about these things. I should think I was enamoured of twenty different ladies, Barry, prodigally in love with them all, before I married; and very ill-satisfied should I have felt, at any conducting themselves towards *me* with the coolness and ease Miss Somers displays towards her cousin. I'll not believe it, Julia; besides I should be sorry to think it true—for though he has a fine presence, and is a handsome fellow enough, and gentlemanly, and all that sort of thing, yet he does not *quite* please me. There's a—*a coldness, a polish, a glitter*, I don't exactly know what, about him; but it seems to my imagining, that he lacks feeling, frankness, ingenuousness. I very strongly suspect that the gentleman is wanting, not head, but heart; he is, doubtless, a very fitting candidate for prebendaries, deaneries, archdeaconries,—aye, even up to the bishops' bench, may be, but a suitable candidate for Mabel Somers's hand, never, never. When she marries, it must be one with head and heart too. A man of men, he ought to be, fit to mate with her."

"You are very positive, George, against so

much evidence to the contrary. What do you think of the matter, Mr. Barry? You *must* have noticed the familiar terms they were on, and how engrossed they seemed with each other."

"Oh, I've had no experience in these things; have never, like Mr. Maynard, been a professed squire of dames," he answered, in a voice which, through its assumed tone of playfulness, sounded depressed in the extreme.

"Well, from the time I was ten years old I was always playing the *amoroso* to some pretty creature or other; therefore, I do consider myself a very knowledgeable person in all Love's signs and symbols, and I say again, there is no lovemaking between those two."

CHAPTER VI.

"Record *this* with your high and holy deeds,
"Twas bravely done ; if you bethink of it."

SHAKSPERE.

THAT evening, after the party had broken up, Mabel went to Miss Lancaster's room to inquire if she were better. Drawn up beside her bed was a small table, on which stood soda water, a bowl of ice, fruits, &c. (Well and kindly had Lilius commenced with her governess ; she was neither thrust up into an attic, nor cut off from companionship, nor yet lacking any comfort that a lady might justly lay claim to ;) a cheerful fire burned on the hearth, flowers were on the mantelpiece, books in the book-case.

"And you are really better, I hope?" Mabel said, as she sat down, and gently took the hand which lay in listlessness outside the bed clothes.

(One glance had sufficed to show that Miss Lancaster's eyes were swollen and 'inflamed with weeping.)

"She *was* better," she said, "much better; a night's rest would quite take her headache away—she should be perfectly well in the morning."

Her words were cheerful, unusually so for her; but Mabel could see that her lip quivered even as she spoke, and her tones jarred upon the ear, they were so forced and unnatural.

There was a little more questioning about this grievous headache which had come on so suddenly, and then Mabel bent her face down almost to the pillow, and in a low-toned voice asked,

"Is it *all* headache, Miss Lancaster? Is there not a heart-ache with it? Tell me, Leonora."

Her face was instantly averted, and she gave no answer.

"*Can* you tell me? *if* you can, do. It will relieve your mind to unburden it."

"I have nothing to tell, Miss Somers," came from her in a voice that would have been cold, repellent, but that it was choking with emotion.

"Yes you have, and you will tell it to *me* this night. Now. You shall turn your face away. I shall just hold your hand so, and wait patiently till you give me your confidence,

and tell me all—Leonora—all about Riverstone Dysart.”

·In the least audible whisper had Mabel uttered the last words, but the ear to which they were uttered was strung to agony, and the effect was magical. With a suppressed cry she rose up in bed, her face crimson with agitation, and her eyes fixed almost sternly upon Mabel.

“Who told you? Who *could* tell you, Miss Somers? It is not kind, nor right, nor Christian-like, to pry into my secrets, in this way.”

“Hush! hush! Leonora. I have been told nothing, know nothing save from what I saw in your own countenance this morning. It was sufficient to convince me that there had been some link or tie between you; and yet you met as strangers.”

“Would God we had always been so,” said the agitated girl, vehemently, as she buried her face in the pillow, and her hand clutching Mabel’s so tightly, that she could almost feel the nails penetrating the flesh. Her sobs became convulsive, she laughed wild frenzied laughs, then came low, sad, half-moaning cries, till at last she was in a complete paroxysm of hysteria.

But little aid Mabel could render, for her hand was held as if in a vice; but she dipped her handkerchief in the iced water, and bathed the poor girl's face and brow, and kissed her, and spoke very soothing words to her, and entreated her to be calm. After some time she *was* calmer, and herself renewed the subject, which Mabel dreaded doing, lest she should bring back the paroxysm. Cold and rigid was her voice and countenance, as she asked,

"*Why* do you want this knowledge from me, Miss Somers?"

"You have heard us speak of Mr. Dysart's probable succession to the Somerton living. Were I assured that he had trifled with the affections of any human being, it would decide the matter at once."

"And you come to me for this knowledge," said she, bitterly. "You suspect, but you want confirmation—and you shall have it."

She drew a packet of letters from under her pillow.

"Take any of these—any one you choose; read it over, and tell me if there are not curious phases in life—widely different partings, and meetings again. Perhaps if you take the last—I will find it for you; my weakness is all gone by now, I hope never to

return," said she, with a flashing, kindling eye. "Weak-minded, credulous fool that I have been; to have my peace at the mercy of a man without a heart. I need take no shame to myself for saying that I loved your cousin: if ever woman was woo'd earnestly, I was. He set himself to win me, it was his business, aim, and end. Yes, the son of Sir James Dysart, with high, titled connexions; with ineffable pride, fortune, influence; with a handsome person, intellectual mind, and most agreeable manners; condescended to attach himself to a poor governess, earning her daily bread. Deep as was my lowliness, (very different to his lofty estate,) he concluded, I suppose, that I had something belonging to me, which *I* might give away, he not be the worse off. I closed my eyes and ears to him for long, but his perseverance was great: greater than mine, and he brought me to confession at last, he never rested till he won from me the avowal that I loved him. Ah! yes; that I loved him, that all I had to give, I gave to him.

"I was *not* won unsought, Miss Somers; let me clear myself from that. For months I was shut and sealed to my suitor. Perhaps the repulses he encountered, the difficulties in

his way, added zest to the pursuit, increased its enjoyment to him.

“ Having once confessed to liking, my tortures began ; he had no mercy on me ; my love must be proclaimed as it were from the house-tops, not so our engagement. I cared for, I valued my reputation ; but it was nothing to him ; I must sacrifice my time, my duties, my delicacy as a woman, my unspotted name, all, all must be dragged at the chariot wheels of his vanity. ‘ *If* you love me—this is—can be no sacrifice to you,’ was ever the tone he took. Words cannot describe his calculating, his most cruel selfishness to me.

“ For long I did not realize the adamant nature to which I had succumbed ; but I became ill, sick at heart ; my self-helpfulness was leaving me, and I roused myself to tell Lady Barham, whom I was then with, exactly my position, and that I wished to leave her. It was needful I should *tell* her—people would not believe that we were engaged. In her I found a most considerate friend : she commended, and acted by me as women should act by each other.

“ These letters are what I received from Mr. Dysart, during the period of our engagement, before and after I left Lady Barham.

Months have gone by since I heard from him; once or twice I wrote without being answered. I was woman enough to shrink from believing the truth, and thought it possible that his letters might be intercepted. We parted as 'trothed lovers; you witnessed our meeting this morning, his self-command is enviable, he did not in the least betray the slightest knowledge of me. I have no more to add, Miss Somers, save to ask you to be good enough not to pity me; I do not need it; I have lost my self-respect it is true, but I must strive to regain it. I am a mocked and insulted woman, but I must forget it. I am not in the very least, meek, tame. The whole soul within me cries out at the deep, foul injustice displayed towards me. 'Twas to him, doubtless, pleasant amusement, to angle for a woman's love, to throw out baits and lures to draw to him a woman's heart. Curiously interesting must it have been, himself possessing none. A marble block is not so pitilessly cold as he. Juggernaut scarce as ruthless, but *I* am no devotee to suffer myself to be crushed; I may writhe, but my spirit is unbroken.

"Are there any more of these letters you would wish to have? They will none of them

see the morning light. I shall not retain one line to remind me of the past. Would I could draw the barbed arrow out of my heart as easily as I can do away with the written evidence of the miserable farce! I would not mind a little laceration of flesh and muscle in so doing. It is a terrible thing, Miss Somers, to look into your own mind, and find no sustaining strength—no spring of comfort—but draughts of bitterness alone!”

And here, that flashing, haughty light, in her usually mild eyes, was quenched in tears. The aggrieved and insulted woman was lost in the deserted and deceived one. The sobs returned, and those low, mournful, hysteric cries.

So the night passed, with one paroxysm after another succeeding;—now laughing in vehement bitterness—now wailing like a heart-broken creature. Towards the morning dawn, she became exhausted, seemed inclined to slumber, and begged Mabel to leave her.

“Will you gather up these letters for me? Take any you like, and put the rest in a drawer! Before you leave, let me ask you *never* again to renew this subject with me, and do *not* sympathise with or pity me—do not let yourself *feel* to do so, because I shall see it in

your eyes, and detect it in your voice. For the future, I shall need only tonics ; time will bring healing, perhaps forgetfulness. For the present, none can help me, save myself."

Mabel bent over her and affectionately kissed her quivering, pallid lips.

"Then, for this once only, do I bid ' God bless and comfort you,' dear Leonora !"

Her fingers closed upon Mabel's hand with half-returning spasm, but she was bending her whole mind to resolution and self-mastery.

"From my very heart I thank you ! Now go !"

And she left her.

Far from being a common thing was it for Mabel to be late at the breakfast-table, but she was so on the following morning, and Maud went to her room to inquire "what *was* the reason *her* Mabel was such a late bird ? She and Ethelle had been out already, with Miss Lancaster."

"How is Miss Lancaster this morning, Maud ?"

"Oh, quite well again. She had walked with them to Fern Lane ; and they had gathered such a lot of violets for Mabel !

Mr. Ferrand was looking over the morning

papers in the library, when Mabel craved an audience.

He smiled when he saw her, and asked, "If she had come for the scolding he had promised her last evening?"

"I am not. I think I had scolding enough, Cousin Charles, without any morning addition to it. I shall certainly rebel if you draw the reins so very tightly. But enough; I am come on a matter of business—and grave business, too."

"Sit down, Miss Somers," said he, again smiling at her earnest manner.

"Will you be good enough to look over one or two of these letters?" she said, as she placed them in his hand.

A quick glance over one, and a laugh followed.

"Why, they are love letters! Where did you get the absurd things from? What business have *you* with them? Who wrote them? and who are they to?"

"Look at the signature and the superscription."

He did so; and his countenance grew grave—very grave, as he listened to Mabel's statement of her suspicions, and Miss Lancaster's confirmation of them.

"It is an awkward business as *can* be. Looking at it in a politic point of view, I could almost have wished you had not stirred into the matter."

"And have had him placed at Somerton as the spiritual guide of my people? Would not their souls have risen up in judgment against me? Could I have answered it to my father, who commanded me to consider the end ere I made the beginning? Could I, as a steward, have held myself guiltless before God? No! it must at once decide *that* matter!"

"I'm afraid it must. But you must be prepared to find that it will deeply offend the whole family. Sir James would scoff at the idea of his son's love-making to a governess, standing in the way of his presentation."

"I did not expect to hear *you* palliate such heartless and unprincipled conduct, Cousin!"

"You need not turn such flashing and indignant eyes upon me, Mabel. You know if it were my own brother, I would close my doors against him. The man who systematically sets to work to rob a woman of her peace, I should rank in the same category with the thief and the perjurer. But this is only *my* opinion. The world looks upon the matter differently. Such a thing would be

classed amongst the venial indiscretions of youth, and the deluded girl laughed at for her folly in listening to him. Such will be the light in which the Dysart family will view it. Are you prepared to place yourself in antagonism against them—to at once and for ever, lose your Uncle as a friend?"

Mabel quailed for a little, and her tears came—flowed fast.

"I am not prepared; but I *must* do what is just—speak what is true, let come what may. Am I not right in the decision I have come to about my cousin?"

"Quite right—quite. But the right and the policy do not seem to go exactly hand-in-hand over the matter."

Whilst Mr. Ferrand was still speaking, a servant entered with a note for Miss Somers, from the Rev. Riverstone himself. It could excite no surprise that it announced a sudden summons away, the Bishop, &c., choice, there was none left to him. Gracefully, elegantly worded were the regrets at his not even being able to call again at Beechwood.

"Well, this spares you one embarrassment," continued Mr. Ferrand. "He, doubtless, after seeing Miss Lancaster, felt pretty

sure the ground was not very safe under his feet, so has beat a timely retreat. But the most uncomfortable part of the business (the announcement to Sir James), remains behind. 'Twill be a very mountain of offence, Mabel. I suppose the Colonel and I, sheltered under the intangible *we*, must make the best we can of it?"

"No, Cousin; Sir James positively forbade any one being mixed up with it, save he and I alone."

A but half-suppressed execration broke from Charles.

"The man's demoniac with pride and intolerable haughtiness; that he should place it on that footing was abominable. You *shall not* take it upon yourself."

"I must not give him real cause of anger, Charles, by disobeying him; but I am almost afraid he will never forgive me, as it is."

"Well, you must not estimate the displeasure at more than it is worth; and take no steps at present; I will write to the Colonel, and hear what he says about it."

Scarcely had Mabel left the library, when another request for an audience came: this one, from the Hon. Wymonde Barry, lasted

long. Earnestly they both spoke, and Charles's face grew very thoughtful, anxious almost in its expression.

When Mr. Barry at length rose to leave, a beaming smile was playing about that handsome mouth of his ; and his whole countenance was glowing with pleasure.

"I shall not lose a single hour in seeing Colonel Vallancey," he said, as he shook hands with Charles ; and then Charles smiled, and said something jestingly about "his being *very much* in love."

With what an air of high hope, and eager, impatient happiness—with what an elastic, springing step he passed out.

CHAPTER VII.

"For eyes, and ears, and every thought,
Were, with her sweete perfections caught."

SPENSER.

It was quite a surprise to all, save Mr. Ferrand, when two days after the foregoing events, that pleasant creature, the Colonel, arrived; there was generally such a flourish of trumpets, as Mabel termed it, to herald his approach that they could scarcely believe that it was he himself who had thus stolen a march upon them wholly unannounced.

But he it was, in the most jocund spirits, full of amenities to everybody, romping with the children, complimenting Lillas and Mrs. Abney, and meeting Mabel with paternal tenderness, yet almost chivalric courtesy of manner.

The smile would break forth, spite of him, when he spoke of Jane and Captain Harry.

"They were a most infatuated pair," he said, "got no better of it at all; he felt sometimes sadly inclined to scold them, but there came over him the thought of his own youth-

time, of his wooing fair Ellen Soimers, of his feeling that all Heaven lay in her smile, when she *did* smile upon him ; and when he recalled that, he had no heart to scold them, though they deserved it,—they did, indeed ; he was quite worried with them at times.”

He could not tire of talking of his great loss in his daughter. Jane, too, he was sure, began now to think about the parting, for often, when he spoke tenderly to her, he saw the tears come glistening !

“ Well, Colonel,” said Lillas, “ I do think your loss will be gain ; you will still have your daughter, and count another son.”

“ Wait a little, dear Mrs. Ferrand, till your own daughters are leaving you for other homes, and see whether you take *quite* that view of it.”

“ And what has become of the novel ?” asked Mabel ; “ is it on the high road to publication, or gone into Noah’s Ark, or what ?”

Vivaciously laughed the Colonel, as he told that it was still on its travels, and that Nelly was getting quite into the spirit of it, though she still sometimes threatened Noah’s Ark.

“ We had a great laugh the other morning,” he continued. “ Amongst the letters was one addressed to Mrs. Vallancey. ‘ Who can

this be for,' said I; 'surely that fellow Marcet has not got married on the sly,—*eh, what think you, Jane?*' "

"Very comically did Jane look at me; but, however, neither she nor Nelly would touch the letter, so I opened it myself; and lo! and behold, it was from one of Nelly's publishing people. She had proffered her MS. to them, weeks back, but as she received no reply, forwarded it to some other publisher, rather more prompt and courteous.

"When at length they did acknowledge and answer her (a curious epistle it was altogether), they had transformed her into a matron.

"My brave Nelly laughed till she almost fell from her chair with the fun of the thing. 'What *next—what* next, shall I have to put up with, Papa,' she cried.

"I mean to reward her, after she has been a leetle more tried, by publishing it for her; she has been so unflinching and so soldierly over it. By the way, my dear," he went on, in a low voice, and looking round, to make sure Miss Lancaster was not in the room, "I understand this precious cousin of yours has been showing the white feather?"

"I don't know about the white feather,"

said Mabel, looking very amused at the expression; "but I fear he has shown a great want of principle."

"Both—both. The man's a coward who behaves so to an unprotected girl, and deserves a coward's treatment. He, no doubt, knew that there was neither father nor brother to call him to account for his dastardly conduct. You may be sure your finding it out was a providential circumstance. I have always had the impression on my mind, that in having him at Somerton, you would have but a cloaked and hooded Tractarian, ready to throw off the mask, as soon as it was safe to do so. We all know that *they*, or those to whom they so nearly approximate, take *all* weapons out of their spiritual armoury, and hesitate not at treachery to man, in order to do the Church service. And *who* is to get the living, my dear?" asked he, in a soft, cajoling sort of voice.

"Can *you* recommend us any one, Colonel?"

"Don't look in that way, you gipsy, or I'll not tell you."

"But what if I know without telling?"

"Is it to be?"

"*It is to be.*"

He seized her hand, and shook it heartily,

performed the same ceremony with Lillas and Mrs. Abney, seized bodily on Baby, who happened to be near, and made him perform a magnificent somerset over his shoulder.

"I'm quite delighted—I am indeed; not less for your sake than his. He'll be as a brother to you when you go to live in your Somerton home. Far and wide will you search before you find another like him."

The Colonel could not say enough in praise of his favourite, and Mrs. Abney warmly chimed in with it all: it was difficult to say which of them felt most pleasure in the arrangement which was to bring Philip Abney to Somerton.

"I shall be ready for a gallop with you in about two hours, Miss Mabel," said the Colonel, as he rose from the breakfast-table the next morning. "Mind and don't keep me waiting, puss; and we will turn our horses' heads towards Somerton, and look how the Memorial is going on."

He and Mr. Ferrand adjourned to the library. A little earnest conversation passed, and the Colonel said:—

"I like his countenance, if *that* is any index to a man's character. He looks you well in the face. His eye meets yours without flinching, which I always think a good sign.

“ ‘ I trowe that countenance cannot lie,
Whose thoughts are legible in the eye. ’ ”

“ His private character stands high—unimpeachable, as far as I can learn,” observed Mr. Ferrand.

“ That’s well—that’s well. If he were Premier Earl of England, he should not have my permission to address her, unless he were also an upright and honourable man.”

Here a ring at the hall-door was heard, and in accordance with previous instructions, the Hon. Wymonde Barry was at once shown into the library, where the two gentlemen received him with every mark of cordiality.

“ You have lost no time, Sir,” said the Colonel, with a frank and pleasant smile, and a glance at the timepiece, which lacked yet a quarter of the hour fixed on for the interview.

The young man had the grace to colour, as he said, “ It was a matter possessing too deep an interest for him, to permit any delay or suspense that he could avoid.”

His business *there* with *them* may easily be conjectured. There were, of course, many statements to be gone into, many questions to be asked and answered ; but the conclusion was that the Colonel shook his hand heartily, and wished him success in his undertaking.

“ If you had to serve seven years instead of three, your Rachel would be well worth it.”

“ I know it,” warmly, eagerly responded the lover. “ Will you, Mr. Ferrand, not also wish me success ?”

“ I do not know whether I shall commit myself so far as to even *wish you* success,” answered Mr. Ferrand, gravely, though kindly. “ Every facility in my power to grant, as far as being in her society goes, *I will* grant you ; but one word of commendation of you I will not utter. I would not take it upon me to commend any man that breathes to her well-liking. She must be left free and unbiassed, to choose you or another with her own eyes, ears, heart. A very grave responsibility rests upon us, as her guardians, standing in the place of her dead father ; and I need not tell you, Mr. Barry, that marriage is *the* event,—the pivot on which everything turns in a woman’s life. Therefore, when *you* come forward as a candidate for Miss Somers’s hand, you must be sifted, searched, known, on the possible chance that she *may* like you.

“ I have only this to add,—and I do not say it because it is customary, but in the absolutest certainty of its truth,—that you will be an honoured and a privileged man, if you can

win Mabel Somers. Her external gifts, marked as they are, are nothing to her lovely gracious mind and temper. Write that down as *the* day of your life which hears her confession of love to and for you. It may not come; *but it may*. We understand each other, I think: 'a fair field—no favour.' I shall be happy to see you at any time, and I give you a general dinner invitation. Come and spend your evenings with us as often as you please."

"I suppose you will wish to tell your own secret," said the Colonel, mischievously.

"I should indeed prefer to do so, whichever way it ends; whether in acceptance, or—or—in refusal. Let me speak to her myself—hear my sentence from her own lips. I should wish to drink my cup of joy in its fulness, if by devotion I can win her; and if I am so unfortunate as not to gain her liking, I *might*, perhaps, bear it better, if she, rather than another, told me so."

"Your secret shall be faithfully kept, Mr. Barry."

"And I trust you will not demand of me to decide my fate with her so *very soon*. Miss Somers knows nothing of me at present; and my Parliamentary duties will prevent my availing myself of your kind per-

mission to come much and frequently, for some time."

"We shall not hurry you, Mr. Barry; and now you will, I dare say, like to make a morning call upon Mrs. Ferrand. I should not be surprised if you catch a glimpse of Mabel in so doing," said Mr. Ferrand with a smile, kind enough to make up for his somewhat chilling words.

"I'll give you half an hour, Mr. Barry," said the Colonel, waggishly; "I had fixed to ride with her this morning; but I will indulge you with that much time before I summon her."

Mr. Ferrand led the way to the drawing-room, where was Liliás, but alas, no Mabel, visible.

The Colonel observed to him on his return—

"I'm really quite prepossessed with Mr. Barry, he's both manly and gentlemanly."

"He could not have conducted himself better," quietly responded Mr. Ferrand. —

Dr. Merridan dined with them that evening, and, *of course*, Mr. Barry.

"Will you take Miss Somers in, Mr. Barry?" said Mr. Ferrand. (Why did thine heart beat so tumultuously, young lover, at practising that simplest courtesy of daily life?)

The Colonel was gay even to hilarity ; and amazingly enjoyed the home thrusts passing between Mrs. Abney and the Doctor, upon that perennial subject, Homœopathy ; “ Splintering Lances,” he called it, and listened with the keenest relish, occasionally lending a helping hand to either side, impartially.

Unsatisfiably fond of music was the Doctor ; and this evening enticed Miss Lancaster to the piano—Mabel, who was generally ready to his call, being engaged chess-playing with Mr. Barry,—where she sung with so much archness and gaiety, that the Doctor was fain to compliment her on her charming voice, and admirable spirit. It must have been some spiteful, elvish creature’s promptings, that induced him afterwards to select for her delectation, the theme of Mr. Dysart ; and the highly favourable impression he had made, the golden opinions won at Somerton, by his affable manners, and pulpit eloquence ; the good effect of both, no doubt, deepened by his handsome and imposing presence.

With the utmost coolness and *sang froid* did she listen, her answers quite easy ; her countenance perfectly calm ; but all felt it was an awkward subject ; and Mabel grew so fidgetted and nervous, that she made an indiscreet

move, and got her king into check in consequence.

“Do, Doctor, come here and advise me; and when our game is finished, Miss Lancaster and I will play you some German music—shall I place my Queen there—or there, Doctor? I have practised it entirely to play to you, as you have such a passion for——Is it possible, Mr. Barry, that you have *check-mated* me?”

Utterly astonished, almost unbelieving was her look at him. Charles, who had been watching the progress of the game, turned away with an irresistible desire to laugh, as he caught Mr. Barry’s eye.

Soon was there an animated colloquy between the Colonel and Mabel; persistent was he that he must leave on the morrow; she, equally persistent that he must not; why did he want to go?

At last the truth popped out. He must really go, for he had *tabooed* the Captain’s visits, during his absence; and poor Jane’s dolour was great.

“I will not say another word about it, dear Colonel, Jane and Captain Harry must on no account be distressed; though why you, who have always hitherto given us the pleasure of anticipation, as well as of your actual presence,

should now come, just make yourself seen, heard, and then vanish, like some uncanny creature, remains one of the things still to be accounted for : if you were not above all suspicion—far as the stars are above gross clouds—I should fear some strategy in this.”

Such an earnest, searching, yet mirthful gaze of her resplendent eyes was bent upon him as she spoke, that Charles again felt that irresistible desire to laugh steal over him, and the Colonel, to judge from his countenance, had some difficulty to restrain himself from a hearty cachinnation.

Quickly sped the evening hours. Never since “her shadow had fallen upon his breast” had her lover felt so full of hope and joy. She was near to him—she, who had all at once become a very present necessity of his life, was near enough for him to hear her soft calm-breathing, nay, to feel it, once, or twice, fanning his cheek. Soon, he prayed a lover’s prayer, it might not be quite so calm when *he* sat by, have more of tumult, be more like his own.

Her gleaming hand rested on the chess-table—covetously did he regard it ; how soon could he press, clasp it passionately if he dared ; aye, if he dared, for one glance from the

witching eyes which looked now and then into his, and he felt that all power to dare had fled.

A two-fold task had he—to watch her—surround her with his presence, till she learned to look for, prize it, sigh when he came not. Again, he had to prevent her woman's instinct detecting his secret; quick was she, yet see his heart-worship she must not—by no look, or sign; by no language, mute or spoken, must he alarm her sweet maiden thoughts, before he had time to steal in and home there.

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“Now, my dear,” said the Colonel the next morning, “we'll just get the little announcement made to Sir James, to-day, about this living of yours. But you must let Charles and I march through Coventry with you.”

“No, I must march through it all alone, dear Uncle,” said Mabel, trying to smile, but looking excessively dismayed at the task before her.

Twenty different letters did she pen and tear up, ere she wrote one that satisfied herself and her guardians too.

Sufficient, but brief and terse were the words of the mistress of Somerton—Patroness of Somerton living, in her announcement that

she had conferred it on another than Sir James Dysart's son. There was no ambiguity, she sought not to shelter herself. "It was I, Mabel Somers, have done this, because I thought it right, and my duty so to do."

But Mabel had the pen of a ready writer, and in her accompanying letter to Sir James she poured out all her woman's eloquence in pleading for herself, that she might not, by the fulfilment of that most ungracious, painful task, alienate him from her. She reminded him how alone she stood, the only one of her name—an utter orphan; therefore, she besought him to suffer her to believe, that in him she had a friend still.

The Colonel had sat in the library all the time that she was inditing one epistle after another, ere she could satisfy herself that, as Mabel Somers, she had humbled herself sufficiently to this hard and steely uncle of hers.

"Will that do, dear Colonel?" she asked at last, as she placed a completed letter before him.

A curious air of vexation stole over his face as he read—

"It will *not* do, Miss Somers; it is a great deal too meek and humble. You actually prostrate yourself before him."

Mabel laid her face upon his shoulder, and burst into tears.

"Nay, nay, child—dear child, come, cheer up, I can't bear to see a woman cry—never could. It's not I, surely, that has brought the tears? I shall cry too, if you don't give over. Now, just listen to me; let *us* settle this matter for you with Sir James. Young as you are, you ought not to be placed in such a position. None but a cold hard man *would* have placed you so. You shall not submit to it. *We* will tell him. Devil take him," added the Colonel, with considerable energy.

"I have no choice; he ordered—commanded me; and he will never forgive me for it as long as I live." —

So Mabel's letter went, all meek and humble as it was. The same post conveyed back to the Rev. Riverstone the eloquent epistles he had penned to Miss Lancaster. They were enclosed without one accompanying word.

But soon did Mabel's cheerfulness return, and she got chatting that evening with Mr. Barry about Italy and the Tyrol; and she was describing to him the scenery of the Lago di Garda, which he had not visited, but about which she was quite enthusiastic.

"I saw the sun set and the moon rise on

the lake, and I never can forget the infinite beauty of both the one scene and the other. Do you know, Mr. Barry, I vowed a vow to myself that if I ever married, I *would* certainly spend the honeymoon on the banks of the Lago di Garda," she said, with a laugh.

"A most fitting place, I should imagine; to look at such an earth and such a heaven all steeped in the purple light of love—purple, or rosy, is it, Miss Somers?"

"I declare you are laughing at me, Mr. Barry," she exclaimed, as, spite of himself, a look, all too unguarded, came; "if you wear that satirical expression, I shall consider you a very alarming person, and cease to talk to you."

CHAPTER VIII.

"Women and a secret
Are hostile properties."—RICHELIEU.

"LILIAS, *can* you keep a secret?" asked Mr. Ferrand.

"The question has insult in it," replied Liliás, laughing gaily; "I *do* think I could if I tried; what is it?"

"Mr. Barry wants to marry Mabel."

Liliás's eyes opened very wide, she then clapped her hands, and *pirouetted* about the room.

"How *charmant!* when did he tell you? Did he fall in love with her at Trent? Does Mabel know about it? and what does she say? The connexion of all others one would wish for her. I like him very much, Charles, did from the first; and his place, Bulegh Court, is but forty miles off. She might have married some one who would have taken her right away from us; what a nice, delightful arrangement it is!"

And again Lily clapped her hands; and danced about.

"The first act of the drama is but just begun; yet you (woman like) jump at once to the conclusion. Now listen to me, Liliás; this is Mr. Barry's secret, and so it must remain till he chooses to reveal it. (Candidly, I would not have communicated it to *you*, had it been possible to keep it from you). Mabel knows nothing about it. Now, that Mr. Barry is a favourite with you, I know, but not for that will I have him favoured. You shall neither help, nor hinder in the affair. *There shall not be* one word to Mabel; hint breathed, look given. I am in earnest, have spoken so as to be understood. Now promise at once, Liliás."

"Shall—will," said the Lily, with a half pout, and toss.

Her husband smiled, and called her "a rebellious wife," something else too he whispered about Mabel's "marriage being as happy as their own," and Liliás's eyes laughed out again once more; and she gave him her promise to keep Mr. Barry's secret. Though she said, "she knew she should be over-weighted with it."

There was no delay in proffering the Somerton living to Mr. Abney. Mabel herself wrote, requesting him to become the

spiritual guide of her people. Gratefully did he accept her proffer ; and in a brief time, came and entered upon his ministerial duties.

His first Sunday was memorable. Very unaffected was his demeanour in the pulpit, no mannerism or trick whatever. Grave, serene, meek he stood ; the man lost in the clergyman. Scarce did the ear at first take in the wondrous compass, magic of his voice, so quiet was it ; yet soon eye, ear, heart, were bent in rigidest attention. The very soul within him seemed to hover on his lips, in the might of that intense earnestness ; and his hearers sat thrilling under its power. Delicately did he allude to his coming amongst them an utter stranger ; and the purpose ; the object he set before himself to attain in his ministry.

“I trust to aid, to assist you in securing convictions, which will bear undying fruit, when I and the very remembrance of my name shall have passed away for ever. You and I are journeyers, passing through the land of shadows, (where nothing we grasp), into the realms of eternal realities. O let us not loiter by the way. Let our feet press forward.”

Very often was Mr. Barry now at Beech-

wood, and soon it seemed to settle into a regular custom, that he, (no matter what other guests there were,) should take Mabel in to dinner, and also secure a place beside her in the drawing-room. A little habit had she, (doubtless acquired when listening with rapt eager attention to her dear father's words) of looking earnestly at those whom she liked when they spoke: and frequently did her eyes now dwell upon the lover's countenance whilst he was speaking, with so much earnest, yet perfectly ingenuous frankness of expression, that it amused Liliás excessively; and almost upset Charles's gravity, sometimes.

Not so very often did the lover allow himself to meet the sweet gaze; something at his heart whispered him, that he might betray himself did he do so.

"It's really delicious to see Mabel's innocence," said Liliás; "I declare I will buy her a Horn-Book of love; but how cautious Mr. Barry is. You were not so cautious, Charles."

"Nor you quite so innocent, my Lily," was his rejoinder.

Not in the least corrected of her gipsyism was Mabel; still as fond was she of being out under the shining summer sun, and in the fresh, flower-scented air; its soft breezes seeming

ever to waft brighter colour to her cheek ; deeper lustre to her eye.

Accompanied by some others of the party, she and Mr. Barry rode, drove, or walked together, constantly ; along the shady lanes with broad green margins, o'erhung with wild rose and with lush woodbine, they sauntered slow ; or galloped gaily off to view from some bold cliff, a sweeping expanse of meadow and of strath ; or in the dim familiar shadow of her own ancient woods, they walked, where all must stay to listen to the leafy music of the fine old trees.

But ah ! what music was there like her voice to him ?

Nothing pleased her better, than to come upon troops of children, flower gathering in her plantations ; or to surprise a great boisterous pic-nic party, all laugh and mirth and jollity, dancing in the pleasant, grovy shade. Ever did she greet with smiling courtesy, ever was she greeted with the deepest respect. All from far and near, knew the young, lovely, most gracious lady of Somerton.

Deep enjoyment was it to the lover to feel her presence, to have the little hand he coveted past all words telling, oft resting on his arm ; to look in her sweet face, to hear her soft-

breathed words. All this was bliss, but not enough: not content was he, nor satisfied. Show her yet, he dared not, how she was hidden in his heart; how she sat "i' the centre," from whence every hope and aspiration for his future radiated. Often was he tempted to raise her dear hand to his lips, and tell her all the loving passion that was possessing him, but ever did he check himself: the time for it had not yet come. No consciousness mantled on her cheek, or gave sweet unrest to her eye. So he waited still, hoping, yet fearing; heart-sick with fear at times, lest it should not be for *him* to call her love into life, to awaken her to the master passion of humanity, to vivify her.

It did occasionally occur to Mabel as being singular, that Mr. Barry should all at once drop into such quiet, easy intimacy at Beechwood; but she heard no one remark upon it, as being other than a thing of course; and the subject was dismissed from her mind, and she enjoyed his society, and liked to discuss with him her plans for her people. So when he came and went—and came and went again, she got into the way of asking when he would return? and saying, with a frank, smiling look,—

“ They should all be glad to see him back again.”

In truth she had not the faintest suspicion that *her* eyes were the lode-stars which drew him there so constantly ; that she was the sorceress whose spells and incantations witched him into ever seeking her presence, and fettered him there ; that when she put her hand into his in frank, unreserved welcome, his thrilled with its gentle contact, and his whole being quivered, vibrated, and aflamed under it, and in the fond, overpowering desire to render the simple touch an ardent pressure.

Little did she imagine how, after his quiet good-night, he sat for hours recalling her looks, and words, and tones with the most passionate fondness ; asking himself if it were possible that one so gracious in mien, so true to all natural and womanly sympathies, should steel her heart to the most glorious sympathy of all—refuse her woman’s destiny to love, and to be loved.

She could not—could not. It were an outrage to nature to suppose it. What, then—was *he* the enchanter, the Prometheus to animate the beautiful statue with love’s life and light, and warmth ; give it pulses, passions ; communicate to it the electric spark

to answer responsive to his own. Could he, or could he not do this? None, save herself, could answer; and he dared not ask. One step too forward, and he might lose his vantage-ground—lose all.

Such were the lover's musings and self-questionings (too oft self-torturings); whilst she, the most unconscious object of them, was taking her pleasant rest—the rest of youth and health; perhaps meeting and holding communion with her lost father in that strange dream-world of which we know so little, which we see so dimly.

Spring and summer had sped on. It lacked but two or three days of Jane Vallancey's marriage-day. One of her bridesmaids was Mabel to be. On the morrow she would leave for the Manor, accompanied by the whole Beechwood party, and by Mr. Abney—(very much was the latter at Beechwood now.)

It was a sultry evening after a glowing day. Lillas and Mr. Ferrand were both in the drawing-room, as were also Mr. Barry and Mr. Abney. Not long had they either of them arrived. After chatting some time, Lillas proposed that they should go out in the grounds; "all the others *were* out," she added, carelessly; "they might as well join them."

They strolled about some time, and by-and-by came within hearing (at least) of those they sought.

Under the spreading umbrage of a magnificent drooping elm, stood a large, circular, airy sort of room. Light latticed pillars sustained the impacted roof, through which passed the stem of the noble tree, and over which the palmated ivy, roses, clematis, and bindweed, waved in richest luxuriance. The Temple of the Winds (so it was designated) was a most cool and breezy lounging place, when in all others was sultriest heat.

In this temple were gathered together Mabel, her satellites the children, and Mrs. Abney; wholly given up to *abandon* they seemed, for peal after peal of the most joyous laughter rang out.

A little nearer (their steps unheard on the greensward) and they could see Mabel with baby Frank on her lap. She was begging kisses of the boy; and he, looking imperious as an emperor, was coquetting and refusing them, except she cajoled him with a pretty, sweet name for every kiss.

“ Give me another—another I *will* have.”

“ Call me pretty name, first.”

“ I have given you all I can think of; now

I say, you are a naughty varlet for denying me."

"You shan't have one till you say I am an angel, as Aunt Mary does."

Again the laugh rang out.

"You are a dear angel, and a Cupidon, and a bird of paradise, and, moreover, a precious, darling, naughty fellow ;—there now, give me a dozen kisses from these dewy lips of yours, for all those sweet, sweet names. You little miserly fellow, you have given only ten. Come, pay me the rest, and some over."

It was utterly impossible to resist laughing, even though it spoiled the fun, for the sound reached Mabel's ears. She put Baby down, and lifted up such a frightened, burning face, panic-stricken quite, and, seeing the party close upon her, seemed strongly inclined to run for it ; but in truth there was no time, for Liliás, with a keen appreciation of its laughableness, merrily began to quiz her about her interesting occupation.

Endeavouring to assume an easy *nonchalant* air, but making a woeful failure of it, Mabel parried the attack as she best could, and soon attacked them in turn for eaves-dropping. With abundant spirit and archness did she

rally them on the malpractice they had been guilty of.

"I do not wonder so much at you, Lillas; your spirit of fun is so unsubduable; but neither you, Mr. Abney, nor you either, Mr. Barry, must expect me to shake hands with you to-night."

"You are not serious, I am sure; let me put you to the proof," said Philip, looking really distressed as he extended his hand. For half a minute she refused; then smilingly and frankly placed her palm in his.

"I must make an example of some one; so Mr. Barry shall be the scapegoat for you all," she laughingly said; "and now, will you come with me?—Mrs. Abney wishes to see you, and we will leave these two graceless people to their own evil devices."

—The evening was closing in, yet were there two still softly pacing up and down a smooth turf alley, enjoying its cool balminess. Mr. Barry was lingering by Mabel's side, though his carriage had been waiting long. They were speaking of the Colonel, and Jane and Nelly; greatly to Mabel's surprise, she found that he knew them all; had been at the Manor; nay, was to be there on the occasion of Jane's

marriage. How strange it was, that she never heard them mention his name.

Speaking in terms of warm admiration of the Colonel's fine frank character was he; of his perfect gentlemanliness, his high sense of courtesy and honour.

"I'm so pleased you like him. To me he seems the very model of a Paladin, and *preux chevalier*. Don't you think Miss Vallancey will will make a very pretty bride?"

"Very sweet, gay-looking creature she is certainly, and very attractive. I do not wonder that Captain Malcolm is so much in love."

"But *you* do not know the Captain, Mr. Barry?" said Mabel, quickly and interrogatively.

"Yes, I do, Miss Somers; at least I have seen him at the Manor."

There was a something smiling, provoking in his manner, which made Mabel more curious respecting his knowledge of the Vallanceys; yet she could not question him point blank concerning it, and he evidently did not choose to tell without.

More chit-chat followed; but the "Good night," must be said: protract and linger as the lover might. So it came at last, and her hand was clasped in his, ere she bethought

herself, that she was not to shake hands with him that night at all.

"I had forgotten; you ought to have reminded me, that I had condemned you to a sort of outlawry, Mr. Barry, so that I could not yield you my hand in friendship."

"I could not—would not leave, if I believed there was aught but amity between you and I, Miss Somers."

Not much were the words; but low, deep, full of meaning, was the tone in which they were uttered. Quick and fast rushed the bright blood over her face and brow, as for an instant she raised her eyes and encountered his gaze riveted on her—full of Love's confession was it.

Another minute and they had parted. Filled with exulting joy was the lover's heart. With sighing, yet blissful unrest was Mabel's. Now she knew that he to whom men listened, was waiting for her smile.

Her thoughts, that night, were like the quivering of the water Iris, in the running streamlet.

CHAPTER IX.

“ Holy and pure are the drops that fall,
When the young bride goes from her father’s hall ;
She goes unto love yet untried and new,
She parts from love which hath still been true.
—Hush—hush ! and let her tears
Flow to the dreams of her early years.”

MRS. HEMANS.

SHALL we tell of all the bustle and hurry of preparation which the Beechwood party found on their arrival at the Manor, on the day preceding happy Jane’s marriage-day ? Of the Colonel’s most uncomfortable fidgettiness—of Nelly’s most considering thoughtfulness ; truly, was she the corner-stone of all the arrangements. Of Jane’s flushing, paling, face ; mirthful and, anon, tear-gathering eyes ? Of Captain Harry’s four, dashing, well-looking sisters who, with Ellen and Mabel, made the six bridesmaidens : of Harry’s arrival to dinner, kissing Jane before them all, and calling her with no trifling emphasis, ‘ His Jane—his own, own Jane,’ and adding ‘ That as they were to be married by that time to-morrow, he issued

one little command on the strength of it—potent as a royal mandate must it be—his Jane must shed no tears.”

At which Jane laughed merrily, and then wept hysterically, whereupon Harry drew her aside ; and with some loving rhetoric or other, dispersed the tears quickly.

The Captain’s light-heartedness made them all merry.

“ *He* was not sad—not he—he was the happiest man alive. What Jane found to be sad about, he could not tell ; and she could not give him any explanation ; but he should take care and kiss all her tears away,” he said to his wife-elect, in anything but an under-tone.

The Misses Malcolm were very much in the style of their brother, frank, pleasant, always something to say ; and saying it, with sprightliness, and good humour. It remained for the next day to show what accomplished flirts they were.

The evening was wearing on in light, cheerful chat ; when one and all were suddenly brought to a stand-still, by an abrupt exclamation from the Captain,—

“ Where *is* Jane all this time ? ”

All had perceived that she and the Colonel were not in the room, though none but the

impatient lover knew how long they had been out of it.

"She went out of the room with Papa," said Ellen, quietly.

"Do, Ellen, go and see what has become of her ; perhaps she's crying again ; do go, there's a dear sister," said he, coaxingly.

Ellen went accordingly, but soon returned.

"Papa and she are having a little chat in the library ; they will be in presently."

Immensely dissatisfied did the Captain look. He placed himself at the window, apparently watching the clouds, as they lazily sailed athwart the evening sky ; but every now and then consulting his watch, with an air of much impatience, and annoyance.

The door opened at last, and Jane entered leaning on the Colonel's arm. It seemed that one step brought the Captain from the window to her side ; and his eyes went searchingly over her face, which certainly wore a very April sort of look ; his gaze went from her to the Colonel, as if he would call him—even him, her father, to account for those tear-traces. The Colonel met his almost angry look with an air of calm dignity.

"My girl has no mother to advise her, Harry ; so I have taken her in hand, and been telling her that life's a journey, where

you travel over rough roads as well as smooth ones. That, in the happiest marriage, the shadow chases the sunshine at times; and that love wants food as well as sweetmeats—strong meat as well as *bonbons*. That it can't live and flourish without daily sustenance. That she must look up to you, and study you; and, above all things, (as a soldier's wife,) obey orders, and must do her duty—and more than her duty; and never look into my face again, if she does not make a good wife."

He was going on, but there arose such a chorus of voices, calling on him to stop—such an indignant burst from the ladies of the party, that he was obliged to cease, adding only—

"I tell her this before you, Harry, that *you* may know what to expect, and she to render."

"Oh, Colonel!" said Harry, kissing Jane's hand most fondly, and looking at her with boundless faith depicted on his face, "I shall be a husband, not a tyrant."

"And now I think, Colonel," observed Lillias, very, very saucily indeed, "as you have read Jane such a lecture in our presence, we had better hear what you have to say to Captain Malcolm on *his* duties."

"Oh! Jane takes him for better *far worse*,"

replied he, with such marked emphasis on the last word, that all laughed.——

“Bring flowers to crown the bride.”

If ever a woman looks lovely, brightly, purely lovely, in her whole life-time, it is the day she is a bride. With her fluttering heart, her radiant eyes, her sweet, yet most unresting smile——“the observed of all observers”——honouring and honoured she goes forth from her parents’ roof in bridal attire, pure vestal white, to return to it, not daughter only, but a wife—a matron of the land.

The sun rode cloudlessly in the heavens on Jane’s marriage-day; her birth-day and Midsummer-day all in one.

The bridesmaids quickly dressed that they might assist the bride; *their* hands, and no menial ones, must render assistance to her trembling ones on *that* day. She looked most lovely—so softly, truly feminine. With such a changing cheek, and eyes whose light was almost too bright for happiness, though now and then they dimmed, when low caressing words from one or other of her young bride-maidens met her ear.

The gentle tending and ministering was done. She was habited in her rich lace and

satin, and floating veil; her luxuriant hair, with its shining curls, was bound about with the pale, pale orange blooms, and entwined with rare and costly pearls, Mabel's own gift to her.

One and another fair young face bent to hers, and kissed her right lovingly; and Mabel gently drew her before the full-length mirror.

"Look at yourself, dearest Jane, and tell me if we need ever see a prettier bride?"

She did not leave her room, but her father and the Captain were admitted there to see her. Full of beaming but almost anxious tenderness was the Colonel's face, as he embraced her. He spoke with her a little, then his hands uplifted over her young head, which looked so bright, so pure.

"It is twenty-one years to-day, my Jane, since you were laid in my arms, a wailing, new-born child. I seemed to grow stronger, and my heart to greaten and expand with the sight of your helplessness; and I blessed you as you lay. You have lived with me these years, cradled in love all the time, and now you leave me. You are 'a bride adorned for your husband;' now also do I bless you again, as a good, a dutiful, and a loving daughter ought to be blessed; and with a father's

deepest tenderness do I supplicate the holy God to make you a happy wife!"

Again he folded her in a fervent embrace; turned hastily, and left the room. The tears were still streaming down her rose-leaf cheek, when Captain Harry, looking every inch of him the happy handsome bridegroom, stood beside her, gazing at her with passionate admiration, and whispering—

"My Jane—my bride—my wife!"

The carriages drove round to the hall door, and in deep trembling agitation, Jane took her father's arm to lead her down. The church was soon reached; the way from the entrance-gate up to it, and to the very altar, was lined with children, habited in white, strewing flowers for the bride to step on. At the altar stood Harry, with his groomsmen, a Major Berners, (as tall, athletic, fine looking a soldier as Harry himself,) and a goodly company of friends, to keep him in countenance. Very impressively read was the marriage service, by Archdeacon Welby, (Harry's uncle,) and the Rev. Philip Abney.

The bridegroom's responses could be heard all over the church, so loud and emphatic were they. It was soon over; the ring encircled Jane's slender finger, the benediction was

uttered, the bells rang out a joyful peal, and all adjourned to the vestry to sign the register. Harry triumphantly guided Jane's hand—she could not herself hold the pen.

But she grew more composed, and received the congratulations of the assembled party, on their return, with smiles and blushes. How proud Harry looked, to be sure, with his sweet new wife on his arm! There was an immense amount of hand-shaking, and bountiful kissing. Sir Francis and Lady Malcolm seemed as if they could not be sufficiently demonstrative with their new daughter, and called her "Mrs. Malcolm," straight away.

Major Berners assisted Mabel to alight, and deferentially proffered his arm to lead her in. In the fervour and bustle of congratulation, she suddenly found herself for a minute in close proximity with, and speaking to Mr. Barry. The morning was warm, *that*, perhaps, caused her colour to brighten up so much; but the gallant Major bore her off to a chair at the table spread for a *recherche déjeuner*, and seated himself beside her. A really brilliant assemblage was it, from the number of military men, in all the glory of gay uniforms—by the Colonel's wish had they assumed them—unimpeachable moustache, and undeniable

good looks, who were present. Harry had said—

“ Now, you must come to my wedding, and keep it merrily, for I don’t know whether, after it is over, I shall have anything more to say to any of you wild random fellows; at least, my wife shall decide the matter for me. I mean to make an excellent husband.”

And all knew that he would keep his word.

A model of perfectionateness looked the wedding-cake, towering high in the table’s centre. Silver Cupids, and Loves, and Graces, of most elaborate device and finish, were set upon entrapping sundry innocent-looking beings, and fettering them with orange and myrtle wreaths; whilst Hymen was gazing with immense complacency, at Mars reverently laying down his arms at Venus’s feet.

Everybody waxed extravagant in complimenting the bride and bridegroom—in wishing them good wishes, and all the best and pleasantest things this life can give, for *their* especial use and benefit. After a while, Mr. Ferrand rose to propose their health, to which both Sir Francis Malcolm and the Colonel responded (into brilliant spirits had the latter risen); and then the Archdeacon addressed the newly-wedded pair.

“And not only them,” he said, “but all the aspirants for marriage.” His eye swept round the gay party with a humorous glance as he spoke. A shrewd, sensible man was the Archdeacon, and very judicious was his advice—playfully given, but very sound.

A day of general licence of speech is a wedding-day; all seem to be on the *qui vive* to laugh and jest. The young officers swarmed about the lively Miss Malcolms, like bees round a honey-pot. Just the sort of gay girls men like to hover about—free, easy, animated—saying saucy things in return for pretty ones—receiving compliments only to hurl them smartly back again. A piquant, teasing, provoking, vexatious, yet encouraging way with them, which showed how perfectly mistress they were of the whole art of coquetry. So they ate wedding-cake, and sipped rich Constantia, and laughed unrestrainedly, as there circled jest after jest about the next marriage, and so on.

Mabel was not allowed to have eyes or ears for any one save Major John Berners, who was an incessant and most rattling talker. But she nevertheless managed to see that Mr. Barry was far down the table, seated between Nelly (now Miss Vallancey) and Rose Welby,

the Archdeacon's daughter, a fair, sweet-looking girl of seventeen.

A long story was the Major telling her, about an absent-minded friend of his, who forgot his wedding-day, and when sent after (the lady, with troops of friends, was waiting at the altar) was found very quietly promenading in the garden, book in hand.

"It was *too* bad—was it not?"

"Quite too bad—past forgiveness, almost," returned Mabel.

"And yet he was very much attached to her, but then he was a literary man, and the most absent in the universe. I don't think I should forget *my* wedding-day," added he, with a very sentimental look at Mabel, on whom it was quite lost; for just then her eye was directed, accidentally, of course, towards Mr. Barry and interesting Rose Welby, who was questioning him about some rare flowers in a silver stand near to them.

A little longer time, and Harry looked at his watch, and then at the Colonel, who in turn looked at Jane. A troubled expression clouded her face, but she rose at once, as also did her bridesmaids: their duties were not yet over: they must now assist her to change her dress, preparatory to her departure.

Harry drew her arm in his, and they went round the circle, bidding adieu to most of the guests.

Jane's leaving the room broke up the party, and they divided into knots of two and three. Major Berners got hold of Harry near to where Mr. Barry was standing, so near, that he could not fail to hear what was said.

"Do, Malcolm, you happy fellow, spare me a minute, to tell me who that rare creature is I've had on my arm, and sat against. She's peerless—a very houri. This day of my life must be marked with a white stone. O Harry, I'm in love, if ever man was."

"Trapped at last, Berners, are you," exclaimed Harry; "why, man, what a joke it is! Your Peri's name is Somers; she's an heiress, an orphan, and the Colonel's niece; and *par consequence*, now, my cousin, so mind you look upon her with reverence, else you'll answer it to me."

"With reverence," cried the Major, "why I'm ready to worship her as a divinity this very minute. Is she to be won, think you?"

"Not by you—she's quite too refined and good."

"I'm indebted to you, Harry, but opinions may differ about that, perhaps. 'Pon my

honour, if she would have me, I'd join the great army of Benedicts without delay; and that's something for John Berners to say. I'll have a try at all events: 'faint heart'—you know. Will you stand by me—help me?"

"I'll talk it over with you, when I return home."

"Nonsense, man, I can't wait that time, Yes, or No! must come before then: d'ye suppose I am a tortoise? Upon my word, I don't see that I am such a despicable fellow," said he, drawing himself up to his full height; "worse looking fellows than I am, aren't there?" casting a well satisfied glance at the mirrored panel, which reflected his really fine handsome person as he spoke.

Harry laughed right out, "Well, I must leave you to fight your own battles, whether of love or war; you are quite competent to do it, and I have no more time for you, now, *my wife* will be waiting for me."

The *empressement* of the words, "my wife," was really delicious.

Lovingly those gay girls tended Jane, merrily jesting with each other over their service of holding her handkerchief, her bouquet, her gloves; whilst one would twine her shining

curls, or kiss her hand, and varying cheek, and another bid "God bless her."

With much feminine sympathy had Lillas watched Jane, and now passing her arm round her, she said, "I've been wishing to whisper a few words to you all the morning, to tell you, in your troubled happiness, that you will be really happier this day next year than you are to-day. I know your feelings so well. *Can* you believe this to be true, dearest Jane?"

"I think it is very likely; I am not *quite* happy, to-day, though I do love Harry so well, and every one is so kind to me. But the leaving my home, and my father ——."

She was unable to go on.

"Don't speak about it, darling. You will soon be back again, and Harry will be dearer to you every day."

And now did the sisters gaze into each other's eyes, for the time had come that they must sunder. Their lives had flowed on in the same calm channel for many years, and most united had they been; but from henceforth it could no longer be so. Ellen had borne up bravely till now; now, that she saw Jane ready to go. They locked in each other's

arms, they sundered, they gazed, they wound about each other again in mute claspings.

"We shall be sisters still," they whispered, as their quivering lips met once more, and their tears mingled.

One long, lingering gaze round the room she had occupied so long, did Jane give ere she passed out to Harry, who, with an almost jealous eye, regarded the falling tears.

In the library were assembled the nearer relatives, a loving embrace and farewell did Jane give to all till she reached the Colonel, and then she threw herself into his arms, and clung round his neck.

"Bless you—bless you, Papa, a thousand times for all your love and tenderness to me."

"And Heaven bless you, my child, my darling Jane, that has lighted up my home so long."

The scene grew very painful ; round him she clung, sobs and half inarticulate murmurs mingling : Jane's first sorrow had come, her affectionate heart was fairly overwhelmed with the grief of parting. Lady Malcolm's eyes were overflowing, Sir Francis coughed vigorously, and turned to the window to hide his emotion.

One more fond caress from the Colonel ;

fond, as though it would be the last, the very last he should bestow upon her, and he said—
“Take her away, Harry, my son, and the Lord in Heaven bless you both, my children ! Take her away—take her away ; she’s yours now.”

And truly it *was* needful to take her ; so Harry’s manly arm was wound about her waist, and he supported her to the carriage, through the phalanx of friends and servants, which lined the hall. He almost lifted her into the new and superb equipage, whose four beautiful greys were champing the bit and tossing their proud heads with impatience ; he sprang in after her, and the door closed on them ; the servants mounted to their seats ; one crack of the postilion’s whip, and they were *en route* to Paris.

“ Well, *I* will *never* be married, for of all dismal things, it is the *dismallest*,” said young Jessie Malcolm, in the most *naïf* voice and manner possible.

(The general laugh which followed this speech, came very opportunely ; all were inclined to think with Jessie, that the parting had certainly been of the dismal character.)

A spirited remonstrance against such a rash resolve was at once entered upon by a Captain

Clissold, with whom Jessie had been coquetting a good deal.

"My friend Malcolm is a happy man," remarked Major Berners, again at Mabel's side, as soon as she re-entered the room.

"If having a very sweet wife can make him so, he is, undoubtedly," responded Mabel, with a smile.

"Ah! what is there *can* make a man so truly blissful as the affection of a lovely woman?" inquired he, with an excessively sentimental air; so sentimental, that Mabel laughed outright.

"Perhaps the possession of a beautiful horse might make some quite as happy, Major Berners."

"It would not me—my dream of delight would be a beautiful wife (she must be beautiful, Miss Somers, it is a *sine qua non*) who loved me to distraction, and was very sweet-tempered. I should like a good house—a mansion, in fact, in the country, with plenty of hunting and shooting (of course, select society) and picturesque walks, where I could stroll about with my sweet wife hanging on my arm—we should be all the world to each other, you know. I think I should very much enjoy pensive, moonlight walks; where she might perhaps feel timid, and cling very close to my

arm for protection, and gaze up at me with her beautiful eyes—I'm a great admirer of handsome eyes; blue eyes, especially, and I should reassure her, and chase her fears away."

"You are truly a moderate man, Major Berners," cried Mabel, as the smile with which she had listened to the description of his requirements deepened into a downright merry laugh at its conclusion. "I do not know where you could meet with a lady in whom so very many perfections as you describe would centre."

"*I think I do*, Miss Somers," rejoined he, with a look of most open and undisguised admiration: so marked was it, that it brought the warm blood mantling to her face in instant alarm. She felt that he was outstripping the bounds of ordinary gallantry; and involuntarily her eye sought Mr. Barry, who was seated opposite to her, conversing with Sir Francis Malcolm: in his calm, even grave countenance, there was nothing that showed even consciousness of *her* presence. Again her look went round, and, not fruitlessly, she encountered Mr. Abney's mild glance: he seemed to at once understand her gentle appeal, and approached her.

"I have not before had an opportunity of

remarking to you upon the very pleasing appearance of the bride, this morning, Miss Somers," he said.

"Yes, I have never seen Jane look so *very* pretty before."

"And, perhaps, it is doubtful whether she ever does again," he replied, with a smile. "A woman's marriage-day cannot but call forth the deepest emotions of her nature, and such as *must* be written in her countenance. No one could call Miss Vallancey plain, at any time; but I thought, as she stood at the altar, with her hand in Captain Malcolm's, that the expression her face wore was so lovely, so pure, so almost holy, that I could well-nigh realize what an angel was."

"*That* you may easily do," observed the Major, with another unmistakeable glance at Mabel. "But did you not think, Mr. Abney, that there was quite a galaxy of beauty present? that bride and bridesmaids formed a most lovely group?"

The smile came again. "Well, perhaps even *I* may admit as much, Major Berners. But," continued he, addressing Mabel, "my interest to-day has centred more in Colonel Vallancey. What a finely blended and delightful character he is!"

"I am quite in love with him," was her enthusiastic response.


"Well, you *cannot* marry your uncle, you know, Miss Somers," said the Major.

The oddity of the idea struck both Mabel and Mr. Abney so forcibly, that they laughed, each of them, and Mabel, right merrily. Sedulously did Mr. Barry keep from looking *her* way: no spy upon her would he be; but every tone and accent of her voice, so animated and gay, and those sweet ringing laughs, fell upon his ear with torturing power. As if it were not enough, some one near to him said, with terrible distinctness:—

"What a flirt that beautiful Miss Somers is! I declare she has never ceased talking to, and smiling upon Major Berners all the morning. How enamoured the man does look, to be sure! I shall write an account of it to Harry forthwith."

"What are we poor men to do, Miss Jessie," replied Captain Clissold, "when you fair ladies put forth all your attractions, and determine to enslave us? We must either surrender, or fly at once."

Gaily pealed out Jessie Malcolm's laugh. "I think the Major has very little thought of flying, to judge from appearances."



“No: he means to bring the fair enemy to terms, I fancy. We shall not have an unmarried man left in the regiment, if we go on at this rate, shall we, Miss Jessie?”

“Except yourself, Captain Clissold,” returned she, very archly. And so they went on, with lively repartee and *badinage*, whilst to the lover it seemed that molten lead had been dropping on his heart.

Shortly after, Mabel thought that she might now make her exit from the room, and escape from the admiring Major’s extravagant compliments; so she asked him to fetch her bouquet from the mantelpiece, where she had left it.

With a very gallant air, he obeyed; but, as he brought it, boldly abstracted a crimson rose. This Mabel saw him do, but did not choose to notice it; and thanking him, she rose from her seat, and left the room,—the Major opening the door for her to pass.

Soon after, the party dispersed, each to follow out their own most approved method for killing time, till the dinner-hour assembled them once more.

CHAPTER X.

“ Saint Cupid, then ! and soldiers, to the field ! ”

SHAKSPERE.

MABEL took care to secure a seat as far as possible from the Major, when all met again in the drawing-room, feeling sure that either Mr. Barry or Mr. Abney (seeing the annoyance to which she had been subjected) would step forward to take her in to dinner. But no such thing. Mr. Abney had gone to make some calls at Atherton, and had not yet returned ; and Mr. Barry was the centre of a group of gentlemen, in a remote part of the room. Not once did she catch his eye, or see him looking towards her. Mabel was surely justified in feeling both hurt and indignant ; a pang shot through her heart, as she thought of the ridiculous fancy she had been cherishing. But small time had she for pondering the matter. In the most marked manner did the Major cross the room to her side—her crimson rose fastened in his uniform : a very

happy augury did he consider it, that roses, like to the one he wore, were fastened at Mabel's breast, and in her rich brown hair.

He handed her in to dinner, and made no attempt to conceal his ardent admiration. Really and truly embarrassed was she (mentally comparing herself to a besieged city). Her woman's wit scarce served her turn, under such a volley of compliments as the Major poured into her ear, in no measured or subdued tone. How to stop it she knew not, for he was on such pleasant terms with himself, so easy and good-tempered, that she could not, and, indeed, it would be absurd to show displeasure at such rhapsodies and nonsensical speeches. She must needs laugh them off.

The Major was rather given to narrating long stories, and he now commenced one, of a most absurd circumstance that had occurred to himself the last time he was in town.

"I had just run up to hear *the* Lind, and had an appointment with a friend for the succeeding morning. It was not far, so I walked from the Clarendon to his house. (I was in military undress, blue coat and so on.) Before I had gone far, it occurred to me that there was a very impudent set of fellows just then in London, for constantly one and another was passing, and turning to look in my face

with a laugh. I began to feel a little warm, then very angry, and anon thought I would surely horsewhip somebody, though I could not but see that the odds were decidedly against me. I might horsewhip one or two, but I could not punish everybody who acted so rudely. I bore it pretty well (though I quickened my pace, and felt my colour mount) till some ladies passed, and they also looked and laughed. I'm not a patient man, at the best of times; but the slowest on earth would have been stirred up with what I went through that morning. Horribly nervous did I get. I thought of the shadowless man, and of the man who had two shadows. I looked on my right hand, and on my left, to see if I had any familiar; but nothing in the slightest degree unusual could I discern. When I at length reached my friend's house (the last sound in my ears, as I ascended the steps, being a gentle cachinnation from a party of ladies just passing), I could perfectly realize the sensations of a bull that has been baited; or of a bear, after fighting with fierce dogs.

"I immediately began to tell my friend what an excruciating walk I had had.

" 'I might be the very father of ugliness, from the way people have regarded me this morning.'

" 'Pooh — nonsense!' said he. 'You

country fellows are always fancying others are looking at you.'

"Just then the footman entered with a note, and whispered something to his master. (I saw that the flunkey was tittering, spite of his trained face.)

" 'Turn round, Berners,' said my friend, almost screaming with laughter. 'Where, in the name of all that is ridiculous, did you get those figures chalked upon you?'

"The murder was out. My coat was not distinctive enough as Major Berners',—it belonged to the gentleman in No. 47. I had been stalking about, (as well-dressed a man as any in London,) with No. 47, figures well nigh two nails long, chalked on my back."

The Major told the story with so much *bon-homme*, that not to laugh was impossible; and heartily Mabel *did* laugh at the conclusion of it.

"Was it not enough to take the conceit out of any man, Miss Somers?"

"It is a great pity it should come back again so soon," interjected Captain Clissold, from the other side of the table.

"Not a word from you, Clissold, about conceit," retorted the Major.

Amusing and good-tempered as he was, still Mabel felt it an inexpressible relief when Miss Vallancey gave the signal to retire.

"Now, gentlemen, draw together and pass the bottles," said the Colonel, as soon as the ladies left them.

They did both the one and the other. The Colonel's wines were unexceptionable. The Château Margaux especially was pronounced to be of a *superbe* vintage. That some of the young officers had done amplest justice to the champagne was certain: a little gentle exhilaration of both look and speech betrayed it, as they discussed the usual run of after-dinner subjects for military men,—crack regiments, horses, dogs, and so forth. One Saxon-looking, hare-brained youth—a cornet lately joined—was willing to give fifty pounds any day,—nay, he shouldn't stumble at a hundred,—to see two locomotives meet at full speed on the rails, and pitch into each other; it would be such jolly fun to watch the two monstrous panting creatures, battling it out!

The Archdeacon and Philip Abney set to work discussing things ecclesiastical, immediately, not forgetting Puseyism in the progress of it. A happy unity of opinion existed between them; each believed himself orthodox, and also believed (in all Christian charity) that those differing from them were heterodox, as we all do, all the world over; 'tis the first article of universal belief.

A knot at once gathered together for political discussion, of which Sir Francis, the Colonel, Mr. Ferrand, and Mr. Barry formed a part. Now Sir Francis had suddenly grown desirous of making a convert of the young, talented member, to his own way of thinking, and that he should never have a better opportunity than the present, he believed; so he accordingly proceeded to give him his views upon that weariful subject, Protection, without delay.

Major Berners had crossed over to the other side of the table, and now, *dos-à-dos* with Mr. Barry, was in the full tide of chat with Captain Clissold. No wish to hear their conversation had he; nay, he would have stopped his ears if he could; avenues of pain had they been all day; but that, nor time nor place permitted; so, in all outward appearance, he sat a polite listener to the urbane twaddle of Sir Francis, whilst really enduring a degree of stinging torture, which almost defied his powers of self-control.

"Well, you *have* committed yourself to-day, anyhow."

"I care not how much, my good fellow; I'm shot through and through. Oh! what delicious pain it is. But is she not a superb creature—a pearl of beauty—a perfect gem?"

Such glorious eyes I never saw. I'm bewitched with them: they are a very 'alarum to love.' Deep as a well they look, and yet soft enough to melt your very heart. I shall call her Gloriana, when we are married."

"She's a lovely creature, certainly; but rather too *spirituelle* for my taste."

"Then you want taste. But excuse me, Clissold; I see your Land of Promise lies with laughing Jessie Malcolm. It *will* be news for the mess, that John Berners, who has always laughed at love and lovers, is ready to throw aside his commission, or anything else, for the sake of a sweet face and witching eyes. I shall offer her a *carte-blanche* to fill up at her pleasure. Do you remember how Malcolm used to tell us 'that our own turn would come,' when we roasted him so about his frequent visits to the Manor?"

After a pause, the Major resumed again—

"Do you think (now tell me the truth)—do you think, man alive, that I've any chance?"

"What do you think, yourself?"

"There seems no reason for despair,—her smiles are most encouraging. This rose," continued he—taking it out of his uniform, and kissing it with much fervour—"was from her bouquet."

“ Did she *give* it to you ? ”

“ I’ll tell you no lies ; I myself stole it from her flowers ; but she saw me do it, and neither frowned nor scolded.”

“ Is she a flirt, think you ? ”

“ I don’t know enough of women to judge. I’ve talked nonsense with plenty, but I was never waked up by Love’s *réveille* before.”

“ If she is, you must look to yourself, for there’s no fathoming a flirt’s artfulness ; they’ll draw you on till your retreat is quite cut off, and then, with the completest *sang froid*, curtsey an adieu to you. Their delight is to give a man rope enough, encourage him to suspend himself, and then leave him dangling, a public spectacle. You *must* have your eyes open if she’s a flirt. I’ve seen enough of their ways ; I’ll not yield to the finest fellow that ever wore knee-buckles, or inducted himself into a pair of trowsers, in my knowledge of women.”

“ You, of course, except all those who mount the kilt,” said the Major, with a touch of humour really remarkable, considering the engrossment of his feelings. “ Well, Clissold, I’ll never believe that *she’s* a flirt ; but whether or no, I’ll try my luck ; anything for her love ; anything to win ‘ Aye ’ from her. O man,

how it makes your heart beat, and your blood spin wild measures, when the woman you are fascinated with, leans on your arm, and smiles at you: the thumps my poor heart has given! I feel to be getting quite—”

“Spooney,” suggested the other.

“No, sentimental. She is the first I have ever cared about, the very first; but *her* eyes are enough to drive a fellow crazy; there’s sunlight, or starlight, or some kind of light in them, that shines into your very soul. *There’s* music; do let us move off to the drawing-room, that I may get beside her again.”

“We’ll first drink success to your wooing and mine,” said the Captain.

They pledged each other; the Major observing, with an air of the most happy conceit, that “There was no knowing how many marriages Harry’s would lead to.”

When the others at length rose up, Sir Francis Malcolm’s face looked quite exulting; he had wholly got the better of Mr. Barry in argument, and whispered him as they passed out—

“We shall see you on our side yet, I feel persuaded.”

There was a great increase in the number of guests; evening invitations had been issued,

and dancing had commenced some time. The first on whom Wymonde Barry's eye fell was the Major—his partner, Mabel.

The Colonel drew Mr. Ferrand back into the dining-room for a minute, and with a very serio-comic sort of face, said,

"Doesn't there seem something wrong with Mabel and Mr. Barry? I have not seen him near her once. Is he jealous, think you? Can we do anything to straighten matters?"

"I don't see that we can; it is better to let the stream work itself clear. I think he is treating her with most unwarrantable caprice; if he chooses to leave the field open, he must be certain others will step in. Who is this Major Berners, who is making himself so conspicuous with her?"

"Ah, he *is* making a sad fool of himself, indeed. I'll tell you all about him by-and-by."

Philip Abney quite departed from his usually retiring demeanour that evening; constantly was he by Mabel's side; if others were kept away by the Major's most palpable devotion, he was not—he *would not* see it. He did not usually dance, but now he alternated with the Major in requesting her hand; and his attention was so gently assiduous, his manner so winning and pleasing, that a frown began

to gather, and dire misgivings take possession of the Major's mind, as to what that mild-looking young clergyman meant by it all."

Mr. Barry did not join the dance; Mabel saw him beside interesting Rose Welby, conversing with Lillas, with Miss Vallancey, with all or any save herself. Her heart swelled high with wounded feeling: when would the day close, that she might look into her own indignant thoughts?

The Colonel called for music, and there was a general muster for the performance of a Bridal Chorus. The Major handed Mabel to the harp, and stood beside her (an admirable opportunity was it for the display of his gallantry and his passion).

"Who is that very lovely creature at the harp?" asked the Archdeacon of Mr. Barry.

"A Miss Somers, a niece and ward of Colonel Vallancey's."

"Ah, indeed, what a remarkable sweet countenance she has; most beautiful young creature, certainly: and the military gentleman beside her"—his voice lowered, and his look became significant—"is her affianced, I suppose."

The lover's brow knitted involuntarily—difficult was it to believe that 'twas "but a shaft at random sent."

“I—I am not aware that he is.”

“I should conclude so. They look exceedingly well together: his fine soldierly person—he must be six feet, at the least—contrast admirably with the young lady’s elegant figure, and most perfect face.”

The carriages were at length announced, and the party broke up: a most emphatic good night did the Major make of it to his ladye love.

As the last carriage drove away, Mrs. Abney said, “Mabel, love, let me advise you to go to bed, you look wearied.”

“I feel so, dear aunt, and will go.”

The Colonel gave her a fatherly kiss, as was his wont, and wished her thrice-happy dreams.

Markedly cordial was her manner to Philip as she shook hands with him; grateful did she feel for the way he had read her feelings, and come to her relief during the day.

Whether her voice and look was colder than Mr. Barry’s, was difficult to say, her eyes were scarce raised to his face at all, whilst his countenance was grave, almost to displeasure; he, too, soon retired to his room.

CHAPTER XI.

"Ah! never—never, loving man was wise."

SHAKSPEARE.

WYMONDE BARRY threw himself upon his bed, utterly and most perfectly worn and faint.

There are—there can be few demands upon the body half so exhaustive as a strain upon the mind. Keeping *that* with curb and rein—holding it in with bit and bridle—mastering, subduing the wild, panting, impetuous thing, lest it should rear, and throw the rider.

The self-command which had been stretched to its utmost tension during the day had all fled. The pride which helped to sustain him (of a proud nature, as well as a noble and constant one, was he) had gone with it. His thoughts were unsteady, wandering. They went hither and thither—were formless, shapeless, vague. But one thing only did he realize and know—

That his love-dream was closed. The hopes he had garnered up, the bright visions he had woven for the future, had become "like the

chaff of the summer threshing-floor, which the wind carrieth away." Dry as summer brooks must his life onward be—no gracious influences—no gushing love—no fruition of happiness for him.

In vain did he strive to command his mind, to master himself, to get power to probe the envenomed wound, to quiet the gnawing pain. He could not do it. Every nerve seemed tense, vibrating, quivering

And so through the night he lay—no balmy gracious sleep visiting his eyelids; but his whole mind bent upon the lovely Icon he had set up in his heart—not for worship, but for love, and to be "a joy for ever." Of fine, and perfect gold he had deemed it; and though earth-born, yet with little of mortal frailty clinging to it: but "tempered finely and to exquisite issues." Now he knew it was not of gold, but mixed—spurious—counterfeit. A form as of an angel, but with feet of clay.

When the party gathered at the breakfast-table the next morning, the Colonel announced that the Hon. Mr. Barry had commissioned him with his "Adieu" for all. He had left the Manor very early. There was an expected division of the House that day, at which it was needful he should be present.

me?) that Jane Malcolm will be other than Jane Vallancey as long as she lives."

Dim and blind grew the Colonel's eyes, as he essayed to read Jane's letter aloud. In a fine sonorous voice had he commenced, but it soon got husky; and he handed it to Ellen to continue. She, too, began bravely; but before it was near done, she put it down, and pressed her handkerchief to her eyes.

CHAPTER XII.

"Beshrew my heart, but I pity the man."

SHAKSPERE.

Not long was Major Berners in making his appearance again at the Manor. In real earnest was he in his love-making. It was no burlesque, but serious, urgent, pressing business. His great spirit grew melancholy, he sighed all day, he sighed upon his midnight pillow. He rested not save he was in Mabel's presence. When there, ever were "his eyes petitioners to her eyes, suing—"

No malcontent was the athlete Major, but true and loyal subject to the "anointed sovereign of sighs and groans."

Rash, hasty, headstrong, he overlooked all possible hindrances to his love chase, and was in no way checked in his ardour by the quiet, pre-occupied manner in which Mabel received his compliments and gallantries—it was all set down to the score of maidenly reserve,

"Which would not *unsought* be won."

The catastrophe came at last, through

Colonel Vallancey. He requested the honour of a private interview with Miss Somers.

Mabel was panic stricken.

"Ah! do, dear Colonel, settle the matter for me. I do not wish—I would much rather not see him."

"I am afraid, my love, you have no choice. He is a young man of high family and standing, altogether. I know nothing against his character or principles; and though you are a beauty, and an heiress, Mabel," said he, patting her cheek, "we must not have you spoiled; remember that *it is* an honour to a woman, for any man of sense and conduct to ask her to be his life's companion."

"But what must I say to him? It will be so very painful to tell him——"

"That you cannot love him. Did you say painful to *him*, or to *yourself*, Mabel?"

"Ah, dear Uncle, I see your reproof to me."

"As to what you are to say to him, I must refer you to the woman's instinct, which Nelly lays so much stress on. But I do believe, my love, that the Major likes Mabel Somers quite apart from the heiress; remember, therefore, in your dealing with him, that it is both a mortifying and a wounding thing

to be rejected. Be humble, dear—give yourself no airs.”

The next morning, early, the Major was seated in the drawing-room, waiting his audience. All the usual stereotyped forms of proposal, floating through, or rather, seething in his brain.

Now, Major John Berners was a man fit, proper, and most willing to head a forlorn hope—would be the very first to mount a breach—one, who could “smell the battle afar off,” and rise up prompt and eager at the clarion’s call to the charge. Yet this man, this strong man, was in a state of the most overpowering nervousness with the expected entrance of a young, slight girl. His heart, whose pulses would scarce have quickened under the roar of artillery, or the wild tumult of combat, was now throbbing, beating, like a sledge hammer, in his breast.

The door handle turned—there was a little rustling sound from Mabel’s silk dress—and she entered, with a heightened colour, an embarrassed expression, and feelings not much more composed than his own.

The Major rose to greet her. He would have retained her hand, carried it to his eager

lips, had she not quietly, but firmly, withdrawn it.

How he begun—what he said—he never knew, neither did Mabel retain any distinct remembrance of it. But he pleaded his cause manfully and well. His whole soul was in his words. The stereotype was all gone. Nature's fervid eloquence alone held sway.

Death-white he turned, in the first agony of his disappointment. The possibility of Mabel's rejection of his suit had at times loomed darkling in the far off horizon of his love; but the probability—never. Her quiet, irresponsive reception of his attentions had not prepared him (most *would* have understood it,) for the sentence which now met his ears.

Mabel's face was flushed, burning. You could read in her distressed countenance, and in the low, subdued tones of her voice, how keenly *she felt* the pain she was compelled to inflict. Most decided her words were obliged to be, for the slightest opening, or unguardedness of expression, he seized at once.

"It cannot be, Major Berners. I have nothing save simple good will and esteem in my mind towards you."

"*Those are* very cold words to utter to a man who offers *you* all. The all is but little when I consider your merits, Miss Somers. Position and wealth, you already have as much as I could lay at your feet. But you have not—you could scarce have, a heart devoted to you as mine is.—Take it; mould it as you please, fashion it as you like—it will be wax in your hands."

"I have not, I believe, Major Berners, if you wish to know it, I have no tie, or engagement of any kind. Few stand so alone in the world as I do."

The Major's eyes sparkled up with renewed hope.

"There is but one more question, dear Miss Somers; *you*, I dare not ask it from, but let me put it to the Colonel." Mabel shook her head. "Ah! yes, do; and if he answers as I hope in God he will, I'll take no denial from you; I'll follow you all over the world, and win you at last. If you *do not* care for anybody else, I am sure you will learn to care for me, you will take me, if not for love, yet for pity's sake. Do, let me hope on. I have father, mother, sisters who will love you dearly as they do me, and I," he continued, his hand-

some face lighting up with more than usual fire, "with you by my side, should be the veriest slave (I feel and know it), that ever woman had. Do not tell me to despair! say, 'that you will give me time; try to like me.' Discard me after, if you find me unworthy, or that you *cannot* like me."

"*I cannot listen to this*: And when I tell you that it distresses me exceedingly to have to speak so coldly to you, but that there is no response whatever with me to your proffer of affection, I am sure you will discontinue this subject, and not again resume it. After this morning, all particular attentions from you *must cease*."

"Is this your final and absolute sentence, Miss Somers?" asked he in a strange, hollow voice. "That there is no future chance for me? that you will not even suffer me to hover about you; and strive to win your good opinion by assiduity and perseverance?"

"It is, Major Berners. My good opinion you have, but simply *that* is not what you ask for. More I have not, and never can have to give you."

He rose from his seat; almost staggering with the blow; his face dark with the

prostration and disappointment of his plumed hopes.

"Then I must at once go away from you, Miss Somers, and try to forget the past; at least not forget! but think of it as a happy dream-time of which you were the heavenly visitant." Bitter and self-scornful did he look as he added, "I have been in what is called, 'a fool's paradise,' I suppose."

Mabel held out her hand.

"I trust, Major, you *will* believe that I am grateful, very grateful for the honour of your regard, for the high compliment you have paid me: soon, I trust, will the painful impression of your fruitless liking for myself pass from your mind; and there are plenty others, as worthy or worthier than I am, who can yield you love for love."

"No, there are not: there isn't a woman in the wide world whom I could care for, except yourself—not one; though it's very kind of you to try to comfort me." He locked her hand fast in his. "You told me, just now, that there were few as alone in the world as you were. No doubt you have plenty of friends ready at your call; but, if you ever *should* want another,—need something doing for you which no other friend will do, *send to*

me. One line, 'I want you,' will be enough. I'll do it without fee or reward, save a smile, from you. You are the first I have ever loved; and for your sake shall I hold in love all womankind. Farewell—just for this once let me call you—Mabel Somers. Oh! if you would but let me say '*dear* Mabel.' Well, well, you can't prevent me feeling it, but I must not offend you, or you'll not make a friend of me in your need, should it ever come."

He bent his lips to her hand, and, kissing it with but ill-restrained fervour, left her. With much kindly, sympathising feeling did the Colonel regard him as he entered the library.

"It's all over, Colonel, all over. I hope I shall get the better of it by-and-by; but I shall not come near you again at present."

A quick, impetuous call to his servant, who was leading his horse up and down the avenue; and, throwing himself upon his saddle, he rode off at a furious pace.

"—— I felt truly sorry for your rejected lover to-day, Mabel," said the Colonel, when they met before dinner.

"So did I, dear Uncle: I was ready to weep."

"Shall we call him back again? He would

come faster than he went, and that was at tolerable speed. Aye, aye, Miss Mabel, you'll get case-hardened to these little episodes in a woman's life, by-and-by. You will be counting up your lovers, enumerating your woman's triumphs; and, when a request for a private interview comes, won't, with such a shy face, be entreating one of your guardians to see the gentleman for you. But be that as it may, I trust, now the gallant Major is disposed of, my poor house will get a remission from love-making. I thought when Jane and Harry were wedded, that we should lead a very quiet life; but, you see, that very day comes Major John Berners playing the red-hot lover at once. I have had serious thoughts of consulting Philip Abney upon the propriety of having the house exorcised with bell, book, and candle from garret to cellar. It has a very good effect, I'm told, in many cases of witchcraft, and haunting of houses; and it might possibly have an equally good effect in love-craft, for that is always accompanied by haunting of houses too. It is such a very undesirable thing for this little innocent Nelly of mine to witness it all; very undesirable indeed, when we consider which way *her instincts tend*."

Abominably quizzical did he look ; and Nelly was quite justified in telling him to keep the peace towards her with his tongue, or else—else she might possibly take it into *her* head to fall in love. “And what would *he* do then ?”

The Colonel grimaced, and was silenced.

“Mercy upon us, what ails the child,—is she going frantic ?” he exclaimed, gazing at her in alarm, as she one morning, whilst all were occupied reading their letters, suddenly tossed one down, rose up, threw her arms round him, kissed him vehemently, passed to Mrs. Abney and Mabel, kissed them also, and sat down again, laughing most vivaciously.

“Read—read, Papa !” she cried, handing him the letter, and speaking with such an exulting voice. “You must all read ;—my manuscript is accepted at last !”

CHAPTER XIII.

“Is his name among
Her paged secrets?”

BEDDOES.

JANE and Harry's marriage, being the first that had taken place in either family, was hailed not merely with the most abounding good-will by the mutual friends and connexions, but with the most substantial marks of it. Presents were lavished upon them in the greatest profusion. Jane's *trousseau* was pre-eminently rich and costly.

But Marcet's gifts (which arrived by the next Overland Mail), surpassed them all—Indian, of course, the whole of them, and of the rarest beauty. Such shawls, and scarfs, and dresses, as were scarce ever seen! such jewels, in the most exquisite cases! such inlaid boxes and tables! such feathers, and flowers, and fans!—and the superbest Cache-meres for Ellen and Mabel!

“Do not,” he wrote to Jane, “I pray you, my sweet sister, in that welling happiness of yours, *forget your brother*. You will be mar-

ried ere this reaches you. Tell Harry, *your husband*, (what a sound it has!) that I will yield up not one jot or tittle of my sister's love. He may take *his* place—you have a large heart, Jane—but I must and shall keep mine."

He wrote also to Mabel, thanking her for her portrait—

"I have been so foolish and weak, my dear Mabel, as to show it right and left, so proud did I feel of the beauty of *ma belle Cousine*; and more weak and foolish still, when the wild fellows admired, praised, but almost disputed, whether it could be a copy of an earthly face, or of some heavenly dream's imagining. I grew jealous—angry, and now deny them looking at it, hiding you on my heart as well as in my heart. I am homesick, Mabel,—yearning for the 'old accustomed faces'—longing for the home voices. I hear them in my dreams, but ah! 'tis not enough!"

—The Malcolms were lunching at the Manor one morning—Jane and Harry, of course, the first subject of conversation, and all their sight-seeing in Paris discussed, and their coming home the following week dwelled on. They gradually got on other subjects; and Sir Francis asked the Colonel, "If he had

read Mr. Barry's speech in yesterday's debate?"

"No, he had not. Nelly must fetch him the *Times* immediately."

She went, but returned from an unsuccessful search—the *Times* was not to be found.

"But, my dear, it *must* be found," said the Colonel.

"Stay; let me see if I can find it," said Mabel, and returning quickly with it in her hand.

"Oho! so it was *you* that killed Cock Robin, was it, Miss Mabel?" asked the Colonel, with a comical glance.

"Hum!—ha!" came in very dissentient fashion, as he lightly skimmed it over.

"Well, it's a clever speech, certainly—we must give the devil his due—but altogether wrong, and unsound in its premises. It is a sad pity he has allied himself to the movement party; for there's not a doubt he'll be one of our leading men by-and-by."

He perused it again, after the Malcolms departed, and then proffered the paper to Mabel.

"Thank you, I *have* looked it over."

"Have you read Mr. Barry's speech?"

"I just saw his name, and read it a little."

The Colonel was on the watch, and saw that she coloured as she spoke ; and her eyes, which, in their ingenuous beauty, usually looked so fully at all who addressed her, failed to meet his.

Merrily to himself did he chuckle, and murmur, " More sacks to the mill—more sacks to the mill ! "

Happy enough was Mabel at the Manor—very happy, she knew she was ; and told herself so, constantly. But yet, nevertheless, a yearning desire to return to her Beechwood home took hold of her mind. She missed the children ; duty required her to see her people, she thought. The Memorial, too, was fast approaching completion. In truth, she was restless. It was strange ; she did not herself understand it, nor know that a name was inscribed on the tablet of her heart, in which her woman's interest was centering, and to which her thoughts and desires were gathering ; yea, and strengthening from day to day.

The intelligence of the Major's rejection had of course reached Beechwood, through the Colonel, to Mr. Ferrand.

" Mr. Barry was often with them," said Liliás, in her letters. Over this did Mabel muse. Sufficient testimony was it that she

herself had nothing to do with his presence there. But Liliás did *not* tell, that *she* had made him aware of the fact of the Major's non-acceptance, spite of the commands Charles had issued for her neither to help nor hinder.

Mabel and her aunt left the Manor only a day or two before the return of Jane and Harry—or, more correctly, now they are married people—Captain and Mrs. Malcolm.

Very struck were they, on their arrival at Beechwood, by the changed appearance of Miss Lancaster. Her cheek had lost all colour—her step had become feeble. Well and bravely had she struggled; her spirit had not succumbed; but her bodily vigour was unequal to what she had gone through—the pent-up pain was as a canker eating her strength away. Gladly did she avail herself of Liliás's offer to spend a few weeks away from her duties. She was long with Mabel the night before she left—fast were her tears flowing—outpoured the thanks from that shut heart of hers.

“ You know, Leonora, I am so rich that it is no favour whatever for me to give; and I have just taken this fancy into my mind, that a visit with your mother to some gay place on the coast, would do you good—Shall we say

Brighton? Well then, that is settled, and you will write to me as soon as you arrive. And if you do really wish to gratify me very much, you will spare no expense, but surround yourself with every comfort: and make me your banker—now, not another word, Leonora.”

Soon was Mabel at Somerton; examining the Memorial with the most eager interest, holding long conversations, and laying plans with Mr. Abney, for the improvement of sundry matters. Merrily did she laugh, when he called her his “Patroness,” and bid him term her “his fellow-helper,” in preference.

“You and I must be the best possible friends; must play into each other’s hands in everything, so that my secular power may never come into collision with your ecclesiastical; indeed, I should *not* like to be anathematized, I assure you.

A mantling smile came over Philip’s face, as he said that he was quite prepared to enter into an amicable treaty with her.

“Very well: then I shall carry you off with me this evening, and we will arrange the terms of it, and you must come to me very often; and we will work together for the good of our people.”

“I see quite well, that with you two young sanguine people at the head of affairs, we shall have sad innovations,” cried Mr. Geary, shaking his head, but smiling the while.

“And all improvements, you shall confess, dear Mr. Geary, or we will at once retrace our steps,” was her reply.

And away she went to make calls; wide open flew the doors at her approach: gladden the sick and the poor did she never fail to do, with those cheerful words and sunny smiles of hers. Long did she talk with widow Collins, who had always most to tell her, about her own getting on, and the getting on in service of ‘John’s children’—the way she always spoke of them; the rough-handed woman’s thoughts were with her husband still.

“Ruth was a very good, pretty-behaved girl,” she said, “and giving every satisfaction to Mrs. Deaville, who now always sent for her into the show-room, that the ladies might see the effect of the caps and bonnets on her before they purchased. Ruth had grown very good-looking, but she was always warning her when she came over, against being lifted up by any notice taken of her; and, thank God, she seemed very steady; she never could face her husband, if any of his children went wrong.”

Evidently, the pride of the widow's heart, and the apple of her eye, was the bright-eyed Ruth.

Quickly did they drive home, for it was near the dinner hour, seven; and Charles always scolded unpunctual members of his household, especially in the matter of keeping dinner waiting. There he is standing on the broad stone steps, but not alone—some one is with him—who now hastens down to greet and assist them to alight.

Now Mabel had asked herself *how* she should meet Mr. Barry when he came; for, of course, they would meet. Should it evince coldness, or any sense of his discourtesy at the Manor?—No; she owed it to herself, to pass it by as a thing of no consequence.

“Should she then meet him with the same frankness, freedom, as she had always hitherto done?”

No,—no, a thousand times, no. Absurd fancies had entered her mind respecting him; she must guard herself against such; they were not consistent with her maidenly dignity and reserve.

She would meet him with the same undistinguishing courtesy, which all other of Mr. Ferrand's guests claimed from her.

So prepared she was, and yet her cheek dyed crimson, when he took her hand, and their eyes met; the language of his could not be mistaken; "forgive, forgive," it said; and yet again "forgive."

True woman was she; her heart bounded with triumph: right royally she placed her feet upon her captive's neck.

Continually his eye sought hers—but sought it still in vain; the gracious, smiling Mabel would not meet his glance—*she would not*—she did not choose, and 'twas enough; whilst he, whose usual bearing was so spirited, and so manly, bowed him to his punishment without a rebel thought or murmur, daringly believing in his heart the while, that he, though now meek and lowly waiting, should win his lady's grace ere long.

Very happy did Mabel look as she sat somewhat apart with Philip; deep in discussion were they upon Loan Societies, Penny Banks, Music Classes, Prize awarding, &c. &c. With the gayest animation was she speaking, with the keenest interest listening and making notes of different matters as they went on.

Full of hope and activity was her mind, sanguine, prompt; delighting to do, deeds following words quickly. Not impulsive; no

flowing and ebbing tides of feeling, but loyal to duty in whatever shape it might come before her.

The gentle Philip Abney was looking as earnest as herself; his eye had kindled up, his cheek was glowing.

"I think I perfectly comprehend your wishes, Miss Somers; your aim is, not to lift your people out of their position, but to elevate them in it."

"Thank you, Mr. Abney, you have defined my wish beautifully—what a gift of expression you have. *That* is exactly what I set before myself. Will you aid me to do this? Will you be my ally, and friend, and helpmate?"

"I will, Miss Somers."

"Then there will be perfect unity between us for the future. I look to you, you to me. By the way, I almost fear I shall get jealous of you, I hear your praises in every house I go into; now you *must* not be *too* popular."

"Upon my word, Miss Somers, I shall put up with this no longer," broke in Mr. Fer-rand, who had kept up a running fire of raillery. "I have heard you call Mr. Abney your helpmate, and now you are talking of being jealous of him; considering that I,

your guardian, am within ear-shot, I do consider it the height of impropriety."

A saucy enough rejoinder did she fling back, but the laugh which arose broke up her *tête-à-tête* with Philip.

Mr. Barry wished to see the Memorial now it was completed, and the next time Mabel and Mrs. Abney drove to Somerton, accompanied them.

Airily and commandingly it rose, an effective and highly beautiful structure, in the richly decorated, modern Gothic style of spire and pinnacle; the pure white freestone of which it was wholly built, gleamed finely, amid the stately oaks and elms shadowing the sloping meadow where it stood, and towered far above them. A tablet in the centre, surmounted by exquisite scroll work, bore the escutcheon of the Somers, and the following deeply-carved inscription:—

THE MEMORIAL.

"This building, intended for the reception of four widowed gentlewomen, was erected and endowed in lasting commemoration of a father's most tender love, by his daughter and only child."

Spacious and most comfortably arranged were the rooms, the grounds beautifully laid out. There were no vain efforts to make

much out of little, to deceive the eye by artfully disposing. There was no need; length, breadth, ample proportion were there."

"And you really like it, Mr. Barry?"

"Indeed, I do; it is most unique; there looks nothing of the almshouse about the building."

"I hope not; I should not like ladies born and bred (such as we hope to have in it), to feel recipients of charity."

One right of presentation did Mabel confer on Mrs. Geary, another on the Doctor, the third to Mrs. Abney, the fourth for herself. The only stipulation was "need" in the presentees.

Mr. Barry went to the Hall to await them, as Mabel assured him that he would be decidedly *de trop* in their village round.

CHAPTER XIV.

"She hath not yet forgot him. Some more time
Must wear the print of his remembrance out."

CYMBELINE.

NEVER in Mr. Somers's life-time had the Hall, with its outstretching park and grounds, been kept in more exquisite order than they now were. But yet over all, over the unoccupied mansion particularly, lay a brooding quiet and stillness, most unlike what it had been.

Not yet could Mabel approach it without re-awakened pangs, not yet come without a welling up of bereaved, agonized love. The spirit voices of the ancestral trees, swaying in the mellow winds, the sight of the terrace where she and he——

"Merciful! merciful God! Let it not all come back upon me! Let me not have struggled in vain!"

She quickened her pace. She would shut out sight and sound, or that terrible grief would flood her whole heart again; and there

was none to comfort her, to answer when she called for him. No human cry could pierce where he had gone.—She gained the hall door. With what reverberating solitariness did her rap seem to echo through the still house! How changed since he had died!

Soon was the comely and comfortable-looking Mrs. Godfrey at the door to welcome her, and make her respectful inquiries, such as she was privileged to make from her long service in the family. Years before Mabel's birth had she been established at the Hall. Very much had she always to say to her ladies, when they paid her a visit. Very much to ask, and to relate.

Seated by the open window in the library was Mr. Barry; directly in front, sunning themselves on the green terrace, were three or four gorgeous peacocks.

"Are you composing an Idyl, or arranging materials for a forthcoming speech, Mr. Barry?" was Mabel's playful question, as she entered the room.

"Nothing so fatiguing as either the one or other. I was just indulging in delicious idlesse, admiring this sweet sylvan landscape, and getting acquainted with the peacocks."

"Let me introduce them to you by name,

Mr. Barry. This is Argus,—that, Jupiter,—and the other consequential-looking creature is neither more nor less than Adonis.”

With due propriety did he acknowledge the introduction, looking very amused the while.

“How pleasant the country stillness is, Miss Somers !—or, I rather mean to say, the country sounds after the multitudinous noises of London. The drowsy humming of the bees, the cawing of the rooks, the soft coo of the wood-pigeons—hark to it now ;—the rustling leaves, and the rippling water, seem so peace-breathing to the mind, after long listening to wearying contentions of speech.”

“I hope, Mr. Barry, you do not include the screams of peacocks in your list of country delights ?” asked Mabel, laughingly, as one of them uttered its dissonant cry.

“Scarcely : the creatures ought not to give tongue at all. Your housekeeper, who seems a veritable family chronicler, has been pointing out to me the various localities this window commands. Will you tell me whether I have learned my lesson correctly ? That is Lady-Wood on the left ; that, Ravensbrook, to the right ; down below is the Sedgemere.”

“You do great credit to Mrs. Godfrey, I am sure.”

"I had forgot. That, looking like a silver chain flung down at random, is the river—"

"Yes, *par* courtesy it is a river, though scarce more than a trout-stream, generally. Yet sometimes, when we have had heavy rain, it looks quite imposing. And what else, Mr. Barry?"

"That *seigneurial* rights and privileges are your birthright; that well-nigh as far as the eye can reach, on this side this teeming land of Goshen, *you* are called *sole* mistress."

"Ah! yes, it is so. It is very sad, is it not?"

He turned, with a smile at her rejoinder. But quickly did the smile pass, for Mabel's lip was quivering, her eyes full of tears. He placed a chair for her, (they had both been standing,) and besought her most earnestly "To forgive him, if he had unwittingly distressed her."

She did not speak, but her hands were clasped over her face, and the tears were fast dropping through her slender fingers.

"For heaven's sake, tell me, Miss Somers, —Ma—tell me what I shall do for you! To think that I—I, who would peril my life to serve you—should have moved you thus!"

Spite of her efforts to regain composure, Mabel was sobbing. Mr. Barry rang the bell,

which Mrs. Godfrey answered in person. Concerned, but no way surprised did she seem.

"Oh, my dear young lady! I knew when she came in, Sir, how it would be. Don't take on so, Miss Somers: you can't get him back again, grieve as you may. It's this room, Sir. She's never been in it since we lost my honoured master, without being overcome in this way."

Fortunately, Mrs. Abney now made her appearance, and quickly understood how matters were.

"Come up-stairs, my love: you will sooner regain composure there. You should—you *should indeed*, Mabel, strive against this sensitiveness. It makes you fail to enjoy the many blessings that surround you."

Less of sympathy than reproof was there in Mrs. Abney's manner.

"If you did but know, Aunt, *how* I strive and strive against it, but all in vain! The grief lies so deep in my heart, so at the root, that I shall never master it—never—never!" And again came a passionate burst of weeping.

As the door closed on them, Mrs. Godfrey, her own eyes moist, said:—

"It's grievous, Sir, to see one so young take on so about the dead, as if she *would* fetch

him back again to her, and couldn't rest without. They used to spend their mornings together in this room, and never did I see a father love a daughter so, and she—she hung on every word that fell from his lips. He was father, mother, brother, sister—all in one to her, and now she has lost him she feels all alone. They say she dropped like a stone when she was told of his death; she has never been like the same since, the lightsomeness is so gone away. She did such a thing, when he was lying dead, as not one in ten thousand dared do. She stole away from her room in the still of night (Mrs. Ferrand was with her, but had fallen asleep), to go and be beside him as he lay dead. Yes, Sir, she did; and there she was found in the morning, stretched across his corpse, with her arms fast locked round it; and she was as white, and almost as cold, as that was. She was several days before she came to herself; she breathed, and that was all the life left in her.

“It made my flesh creep upon my bones when I heard where she had been lying all night. Most people are so afraid of the dead, but you see she loved him, living *and* dead.

“And ever since, she has hidden the grief in her heart. It is a bad thing, Sir, to bury

grief; but she has done it—not spoken of it to anybody, not even to Mrs. Ferrand, whom she is very fond of. All subjects but that; though, every now and then, it has come up to the surface, as it has done to-day. Miss Mabel is very good; she is not like a young girl, Sir, in her thought for others; but all the Somers are born good, if sinful human creatures *can* be. My late honoured master lost his lady very soon. Oh dear! oh dear! what an anguished heart he had! She was a gay and sportive creature till she took ill, (the prettiest lady, except Miss Mabel, I ever saw;) and when she died, (his love *couldn't* keep her alive,) he seemed as if he could not care for *her* child enough. She was his own flesh and blood, and he put his own spirit in her, for she thought as he did; and his ways were her ways. The love she should have felt for her mother, all went to him. They were scarce ever separated for near seventeen years, and seventeen years is not a day, Sir.”

With which truism, Mrs. Godfrey, having relieved her heart a little, made her curtsy, and departed to see whether Miss Mabel was better again.

She left her auditor, enduring the painfullest self-reproach for the harsh unjust thoughts he

had erewhile entertained of Mabel. Girl as she was, just at the epoch of life when youth is apt to be so insolent, having had no salutary lessons from time, but ever reading Hope's golden hand-writing on the wall—for her to be hiding from all eyes deep unchanging sorrow for the dead, hiding it under a smiling lip and cheek,—for her, with all her rich prodigality of gifts; mind, person, fortune, to be satisfied—nay, more, desirous of the seclusion of the country; spending her young days in caring tenderly for the poor, in acts of unobtrusive kindness and goodness, when she had but to let herself be seen, known, to be admired on every hand, sought after, and scores of lovers at her feet,—there seemed no self-condemnation harsh enough for him.

Mabel returned to the room calm and serene. There was not then, or through the evening, any allusion to what had passed. She was even gayer than usual.

CHAPTER XV.

"But since she's fallen in my way,
A child's a child, and play is play."

FAUST.

"SHOW her up," was the response to the announcement from Mabel's page, that a young woman, of the name of Collins, was in waiting to see Miss Somers.

It was Ruth who entered the room, making her deferential obeisance to the two ladies. Kindly they both spoke to her:—

"I should have scarcely known you, Ruth," said Mabel, "you are so changed."

Her mother was right; Ruth had grown very good-looking indeed. Quietly she stood whilst they addressed a few questions to her; but the glow which had rested on her cheek on entering, soon faded to an unnatural paleness—something strange, startling, was there about the girl's look; almost wildness in the expression of her eyes.

"Is anything the matter, Ruth?" asked Mabel; "how have you left your mother?"

Perhaps you are tired with your walk; you had better go down to the servants' hall, and take some refreshment. *Is* anything the matter?"

"*There is*, Miss Somers; can I speak to you alone?"

Mrs. Abney rose and left the room; as the door closed, Ruth rushed forward, and flung herself on her knees before Mabel—

"Oh! Miss Somers, I have such a tale to tell."

"Whatever it is, Ruth, get up from your knees and sit down."

"No, no! *So* must you hear it."

With a voice hollow, till it scarce sounded like a human voice, and hands clasped and unclasped every minute—with every muscle of her face and neck throbbing and working—with eyes looking so preternaturally wild and large, she said—

"*My mother's cursed me!*"

"Oh! Ruth, Ruth, don't say such fearful words."

"*She has*, Miss Somers. She has cursed me with her own heavy curse—and with my dead father's, too. In his name she cursed me, and turned me from her door. I'll tell you all about it: I'm a lost and ruined crea-

ture, and can never hold up my head again. I should be glad to die, to hide myself down in the grave from the shame, and from my mother's curse. Oh! how it rings in my ears.—I got to my mother's door last night at ten o'clock—I had walked all the way from —, sixteen miles. A weary and heart-broken creature I was, but the thought of my home bore me up. The birds shelter their young, and I thought my mother would shelter me. I was like to drop, Miss Somers,—for two whole days food had not touched my lips,—but I got to my mother's door at last. She opened it when I rapped, but did not at first know me; when she did, she bade me 'Come in.' I said, 'No, mother, not till you know all.' And I told her, Miss Somers, what I tell you, 'that I had disgraced myself—that I was quite lost—that I should bear a babe, and have no father to own it.' Her face went like the face of death, as she listened to my words—so hard and stony—and she set her teeth. I was leaning against the door, I was so spent and footsore; but she pushed me out, and I fell. Whilst I lay on the ground she cursed me, in her own name, and in my dead father's. Oh! such words—and she shut the door, and left me lying there—

and there I have lain all night.—I deserve it all. I did not sleep—I prayed that God would be merciful to me, now that I had neither father, nor mother, nor friends, and let me die. When the morning dawned, the birds so mocked me with their songs, that I couldn't bear it, and rose up, and went to the churchyard, and rested me beside an open grave, looking in, whilst *he*, that had been tempting me all night, began to tempt me again, and tell 'how at peace the dead were.' All at once it came into my mind to come and see if you had any pity for a wretched outcast orphan—for I have no mother now, and God is angry with me, and my dead father curses me from his place in heaven, and says that where he is, there shall I never come."

Spasm caught her breath; sleeplessness and heartbreaking woe had done their work; down in a heap at Mabel's feet, where she had knelt, she sank, and lay uttering such cries as quickly brought others to the room, where they found Mabel trying to raise the despairing creature.

"What, in Heaven's name, is it all about?" asked Charles, after Ruth was laid upon a couch.

"Oh! such a miserable story. Come with me, Aunt, and I will tell you about it."

Indignation was the feeling uppermost in Mrs. Abney's mind—anger against Ruth for coming to appeal to, and make Mabel acquainted with such an affair; she must instantly leave the house.

"She *must* leave the house, Aunt, but not till measures are taken for her protection; it is my duty to see that she is cared for."

"I do not see what you have to do with so disreputable a matter at all," replied Mrs. Abney, warmly.

"I have this to do with it, Aunt, that I promised her father on his deathbed to care for his children. One of them now needs help, and I must render it."

"You quite shut your eyes to the fact that she is no longer of good repute. You are much too young to step forward in behalf of one who has lost her character—it would be highly indelicate in you, Mabel; besides, it would be certain to lend encouragement to vicious conduct in others; quite certain to do so."

"Aunt, she's houseless, friendless, most miserable; excuse me differing from you, but I must take my own measures in regard to her."

"I cannot, of course, prevent you doing so,

however much I may disapprove of it ; but I shall at once name the matter to Charles, he will have more influence over you, perhaps, than I have."

Feeling thoroughly displeased, Mrs. Abney sought Charles, to request his interference in the matter.

"Mabel has, what few would suppose she has, and what I never, till lately, suspected that she had—she possesses a very strong will of her own, Charles."

"Few ladies are deficient in that particular," parenthesised Mr. Ferrand.

Coolly and dispassionately he listened to her statement, and at its conclusion said, "I am almost inclined to think, Mrs. Abney, that Mabel's views are the best. We must bear in mind that the girl is no hardened sinner, but a poor trembling creature, already weighted down with punishment, her mind uncorrupt, and may be easily led back to right, if the opportunity is given. But I will speak to Mabel about it."

It was finally arranged that Ruth should be conveyed back to Somerton, to the Rectory—shelter would be given *there*, all were sure. Mr. Ferrand wrote an explanatory note to Mr. Geary, requesting his or Mr. Abney's inter-

cession with the stern mother in Ruth's behalf. If she absolutely refused to receive her under her roof, some other plan must be thought of.

Mabel again saw Ruth before she left, who requested permission to finish her story.

"I should like to tell you all, Miss Somers, for I feel as if I should not live, and perhaps may not see you again. The gentleman with whom I have been acquainted (he *was* a gentleman; and he talked for a long time of marrying me, though he has not done so lately), used to follow me all up and down, at Church and in the streets; and always, in the evenings, when we were allowed to go out. He met me wherever I went; and he made me so many beautiful presents, and wrote me such loving, promising letters, and said so much of my pretty looks and manners—seeming to love the very ground I walked on—that I believe my head was quite turned with it.

"I had to tell him at last, that I *must* leave my situation, for I expected every day that something would be said about my altered appearance. We were in a house tenanted by one of his own people, where we had met for some time. When I told him this, he took

out his pocket-book and offered me a note, which he said was for fifty pounds, never to mention his name, or trouble him again. And he also said, 'If it wasn't enough, he would give me another for the same amount—but *I must never see his face again!*'

"*He* that tempted me last night had power over me then for the minute, for I took the note, and as calm-like as possible put it on the fire, and turned round and faced him, and said—

"'What I might do for love of you I'll not say; but I'll not be *bribed* to hold my tongue!'

"He looked awful—as if he would slay me as I stood. But I felt as bold as any lion, and asked him—

"'If he did not mean to own my child?'

"His lip curled, and his face grew altogether scornful-like, as he answered in a scoffing, jeering way—

"'No! I must find another father for it!'

"I don't know, Miss Somers—I'm not sure, for the room was whirling and reeling round, and I could not see plainly, but I believe that I struck him a blow with all my strength—and I remember no more. When I came to myself he was gone—gone without

a word to tell me what to do, or where to hide my shame ! ”

“ It is a terrible story, Ruth.”

Mabel’s moistened eyes told how very sad she thought it.

“ You have fallen into grievous error ; but if you try to retrieve the past, be assured you shall be cared for. Do all you can to soften your mother. She will, no doubt, recal her bitter words to you. But strive with word and deed to please her : no good can come whilst she is angry.”

Again she is on her knees before Mabel, and, before she can prevent her, has raised the hem of her dress to her quivering white lips, and is kissing it half-frantically.

“ I will, I will ! ” she cried, whilst her hand is thrust into her bosom. Something she tries to find—she does find it, and places it in Mabel’s hand. ’Tis a small vial, holding a colourless fluid. In strange contrast with its tiny size, are the large letters labelled on it—

PRUSSIC ACID, POISON.

“ I will give *this* to you, now, Miss Somers, lest *he* should come again and tempt me as he did last night and this morning, when I measured my length beside the open grave, and

he whispered, '*It was dug for me.*' Had you met me with scorn and loathing, such as I know I deserve, I should have drank it off in your very presence. They told me where I bought it, '*That it would kill in a minute.*'"

An intense, ghastly smile flickered and played over her face as she spoke. 'Twas as if her unsteady, reeling brain, had got hold of some quaint conceit or phantasy, and was toying and dallying with its pleasantness.

Mr. Ferrand had come into the room, and witnessed the scene, which shocked Mabel past all self-command. She sank back on her chair; and 'twas not till she was relieved by tears that she got composed.

Charles bade Ruth rise up and be seated, whilst he spoke to her as 'one having authority' calmly, but still kindly. Little did he say of her sin (how could he? she looked so woeful—and so young to have been exposed to the glozing arts of the systematic seducer), but he bade her look well to her future—to hope and to strive.

CHAPTER XVI.

"The nuts are quite ripe now," said Chanticleer to his wife Partlet; "suppose we go to the woods together, and eat as many as we can before the squirrel takes them all away."

"With all my heart," said Partlet; "let us go and make a holiday of it together."

GAMMER GRETHEL.

THE golden autumn was advancing with crisp ripening sheaves, and lavish orchards, borne down with plenty. On a thousand hills breathed out the lusty anthem of Fruition. In a thousand valleys pealed forth a Jubilate, for nature's bounteous promises fulfilled.

The Parliamentary session was ended, and the Hon. Mr. Barry was again at Beechwood. But not he alone—the house was full of company. Mabel and he saw much of each other, but it was only in the presence of others that they met. Not again did he fall into the error, such as he had committed at the Manor. His place was at her side; he took it and kept it, let who would come nigh her.

He had got bold, whilst she had grown shy.

No words had been spoken ; but well did she understand him now. She would no longer meet his glance, coyly shrinking from the love that she felt was living there—all tender, and appealing as it was. Softly did the knowledge dawn upon her woman's soul, of what was hidden 'neath the surface of that gentle observance and tendance on her. Something was it, not appreciable to the eye ; the touch, the hand could not grasp it—*but it was there*. It made her know—

“ —whose hand was at the latch,
Before the door had given him to her eyes.”

All sorts of parties were formed to make the time pass agreeably,—sketching, boating, target—pic-nic parties succeeded each other day after day. At last some one suggested a nutting party, as a variety. The idea was received with general acclamation. It was just the season for them, and “ A-nutting they would go.”

— Forest was not more than a few miles from them. Mabel's nomadic propensities caused her to know every inch of the ground—she, therefore, must *Cicerone* the party. “ The Somerton people must all go,—and the children,” said Mabel, “ the little merry sprites will so enjoy themselves—*they must go*.”

Lilias was a little taken aback at the last proposition, and hinted something about children being troublesome on such occasions; but Mabel gave vouchers for their good behaviour, and promised, that at all events, they should tease no one save herself and the nurse. So Lilias conceded the point.

They set out on a brilliant morning, a party of between thirty and forty, fully prepared for enjoyment, and also for some tolerable amount of fatigue. Mabel had assured them "That if they went with her to hold Folkmote under the trees, she should expect them to exert their walking powers." She herself took the lead in her light, elegant equipage. Mr. Geary sat beside her—Mr. Abney and the Doctor were behind.

All her own people, of course. A very clannish sort of feeling prevailed at Somerton.—"Shouther to shouther" kind of sentiment. The fashion of it was believed, with perfect truth, to be set by their young lady. In the gayest spirits was Mabel; and with assured ease and confidence did she drive. Her fleet ponies stepping admirably together, and noiselessly; as by a broad green path, overhung with noble trees, they advanced into the forest. . . .

Ferns and brackens in endless profusion were covering the ground. The wild thyme "purpling the curving slopes," and the blooming heath-bells just bursting into beauty. The sun poured lovingly down into the Forest-glade, where Mabel first drew up. She flung the reins upon the horses and sprang out with an exclamation of delight.

"I bid you all welcome to the Forest of —, tell me if your feet ever pressed turf like this before?"

"Never—never."

"To think that I have lived in this neighbourhood for near half a century; yet never once been in this enchanting spot," said Mr. Geary with a lengthened gaze around him.

Rapidly were the other carriages arriving; and exclamations of pleasure at the beauty of the drive, and the richness of the woodland, were heard on every side.

The children and servants with the comestibles, had been sent on before, and had established their head-quarters in the "Fairies' Parlour,"—an open space with the richest tone of verdure upon it, as it lay basking in sunshine; majestic trees bent down loving arms to it on every side; and right in the centre bubbled up a spring of ice-cold, delicious water. This.

was to be the general gathering-place after strolling through the wood.

The first thing which went wrong was a little matter between Charles and Liliás; something in her costume displeased him, and he compared her to a peacock, or Mrs. Geary's Hyacinthine Macaw.

Liliás bit her lip, and looked almost dangerous at this unlooked-for attack upon her appearance; but she, however, commanded herself, and gaily laughed it off.

The children were bidden to busy themselves in gathering nuts for their own delectation, and that of the party; and Mabel whispered to Ethelle, "that if a little wanded, green-robed Fairy came to sit by the spring side, he, or she was to be persuaded to stay till she herself returned; having a great desire to see a living Fairy."

Assuming an important air of *Ciceronism*, she took Mr. Geary's arm and led the way; and after a quarter of an hour's walk brought them to what she called "Tadmor."

Silently the party stood gazing on the scene, that of Life in Death; a thousand tempests, the forked lightning, the o'ermastering winds had done their worst; but their power

was naught,—naught comparable with that of Time; manifest as it was in that vast gathering of ancient oaks: There they stood—bleak, mouldering, blanchèd skeletons, grey and bald—an assemblage of forest patriarchs, scathed, hollow, riven; some tressed o'er with brilliant lichens, and vivid-coloured mosses waving fantastically about their shrunk and ghastly limbs; but most, white, with the bleaching of cycles; standing with outspread, wandering arms, grim and stern, past all hope,—done with pity—Death was at the heart. Some few were lying on the ground half sepulchered in moss and fern. All was silent mid the ruins of the forsaken forest world; the birds came not, nor bees, nor butterflies—the very ground underneath was grey, the bracken and long wiry grass stood dry and sapless.

“What a place to preach a sermon, or compose one,” observed Mr. Geary.

“One is composed and preached too, in its very aspect,” said Philip.

But soon was the weird scene forgotten, as they followed Mabel—hither and thither she went, into nooks and over ferny knolls, through wild glens, and by soft wimpling streams: downright merry grew the party,

heartsome, gleesome, blythsome; and made the woodland ring again with snatches of songs, and jocund laughter.

Light and airy was Mabel's step, as she bounded on; so fleetly buoyant, that it seemed she could trace the forest paths for a whole day without fatigue.

"We must come again, and it must be in the spring; the broom, and gorse, and white-thorn, are then beyond all imagination, beautiful. Think, if you could see now, thousands of full-grown thorns all in full bloom, imagine the fragrance of them and the delectableness."

Gradually had the party dwindled as one after another confessed to weariness, and sat down to rest on the fallen trees, content there to wait, to be gathered into the band again, on its return to the general place of rendezvous, the Fairies' Parlour.

"There is yet one more spot I should like to introduce you to, if you think you will not be too wearied, it is called Harold's Dingle. I am not quite certified as to the fact of Hamadryads hom-ing there, but I assure you tis a very fit place for them."

"Then, gentlemen, look to your hearts," cried laughing Mary Earle, who had been long at Beechwood; "you may present an

impenetrable front to mortal women, but think of encountering Hamadryads: put on coats of mail, chain-armour, scale armour, anything you please, so that it be armour of proof for the nonce: Ye, whose hearts are 'sans crack or flaw,' stand in most danger."

"It would be matter of nice investigation as to whose hearts *are* 'sans crack or flaw,'" said Sir Thomas Chatterton, one of the leading counsel of the day.

"*Mine is*, to begin with, sound as a bell," said Mary: "now, Sir Thomas, suppose we form ourselves into a court of inquiry, and retain you as counsel, give you a brief, or whatever you call it—utterly abominable are those twaddlesome law terms—you shall cross-examine; I, being a sober-minded, discreet person, constitute myself the judge. Mr. Macdonald shall be the twelve jurymen in his own proper person—the Scotch are a canny people, you know—we will first call up Mr. Channing, as being the greatest stranger, and entitled to most courtesy; now for a specimen of your acumen, Sir Thomas, let everything be done in very searching fashion; ask as your first question 'whether in that new world from which he comes, people *ever* do fall in love?' Oh! I had forgotten; where's my wig? can

any body lend me a wig? have you yours in your pocket, Sir Thomas?"

The ancient forest resounded again with pealing laughter, and the court broke up in much confusion, one and all declaring that they resisted its authority.

"Now for Harold's Dingle; I am sure we shall none of us be tired," exclaimed the eager Mary.

"Is there no fear of fatiguing our guide?" asked a low, anxious voice, close to Mabel.

The shy, conscious look stole over, as she turned to him to answer.

"Ah! she'll be tired enough to-morrow," said the Doctor; "the excitement of showing, keeps her up to-day, but the body will have its turn, nevertheless."

"If we could but make it a serf and bond-slave to the spirit, Doctor, what a deal we might do!—I, for one, would never sleep—I would always be busy," rejoined Mabel.

"There is a beautiful balance ordained between mind and body, and spirit; and to infringe upon——Do look, Miss Mabel, at that solidago, and the grass of Parnassus, also—nay, there's the cotton plant!" exclaimed the Doctor.

"And do, Doctor, for any sake, look at

those groups of fungi and agarics,—did you ever see such colours?—why they shame the flowers, they are just sprinkled and starred with silver and gold; oh, Doctor, Doctor, you and I ought to be here alone, to explore as we liked.”

An outcry was raised by one and another, at the shameless selfishness of the idea.

“Well, any way, Doctor, we will make an appointment for a whole day here next spring; we will botanize, herbarize and naturalize to our hearts’ content, from morn till night.”

“I shall beg for Mr. Abney being allowed to come with us; I regard him as a very promising pupil of mine.”

“I am so glad to hear it, Mr. Abney. It is nothing, a mere instinct to be fond of flowers, but the examining and studying plants is a never-ending delight,—plenty of homilies and sermons to be found in them,” she added, with an arch smile, “but you must not let the Doctor spoil you, he is quite an enthusiast, himself. I showed him an exquisitely shaped leaf the other day, and he straightway pulled it to pieces that he might examine its breathing pores under the microscope.—But here we are, close to the Linn.”

For the last mile the character of the forest

had altered considerably; the way had for some time lain under "pleached alleys of trees,"—perfect arcades, stretching over richest turf; then the ground got broken and steep. The party had to walk in single file, and occasionally, hand to hand, assist each other. And now they stood by the side of a deep ravine, or cleft, yawning wide and grim in the rock. There was the sound of rushing water, and far down you caught flashing glimpses of a swift, hurrying stream. The scene was singularly wild: a dim gloom rested upon it, even in that bright noontide. Scarce could the blue sky be discerned through the o'erlapping trees.

"When I was last here," said Mabel, "a party of charcoal-burners were at work, looking very grim and sooty, and you might really have imagined yourself in the Hartz Mountains."

"What does the place owe its name to? Is there any tradition respecting it?" asked Sir Thomas Chatterton.

"Yes, there is a very mournful story concerning it."

"Oh, do tell it to us, Mabel," exclaimed Mary Earle. "Is there plenty of love in it?"

"Yes, enough and to spare; but I will not tell it to you to-day: it is quite too tristful."

But all wanted an excuse for resting a little; so they sat down, and made a general request for the tradition of Harold's Linn. And at length Mabel told it, as she had heard it.

* * * *

"What an *eerie* story!" exclaimed Lillas. "We shall surely hear the Lady Algive's shrieks. I detest hearing of unfortunate love, or unrequited love, or, indeed, any but happy love."

"So do I, Lillas," responded Mary. "I think everybody ought to have everybody that they like best, and no one interfere. I would not permit any one to interfere with *me*, I know," added she, with a very spirited look.

"What sort of a world should we have, Sir Thomas, think you," asked Mr. Ferrand, "if my saucy sister's creed was followed out?"

"The difficulty would lie in the ladies finding out whom they *did* like best," returned Sir Thomas, in the smoothest voice. "The preference of seventeen is rarely that of seven-and-twenty."

"I am quite sure that, when I love, I shall love till I die," returned Mary.

"You had best come to us in America, Miss Earle, we always *do* marry those we like best," said Mr. Channing.

"It is too far to go for such an every-day thing as a husband, Mr. Channing," was the nonchalant reply.

"Will you come to us in Scotland?" inquired Mr. Macdonald. "It is very easy to get married there."

"And be a slave of the ring all my life after. No, no: I don't think I shall marry at all,—there's no man good enough for me. Every lord of the creation seems to consider himself a sort of Grand Seignior, or Autocrat of all the Russias, as soon as he has got a wife whose temper and patience he can practise on. I couldn't bear it, I know. I should speak *aqua-fortis* very quickly."

A general laugh succeeded this vigorous proclamation of Miss Earle's mind.

"But I am very certain of one thing," she continued,—"that if a woman *must* be a bondslave, she has every right to choose whose bondslave she will be. Don't you agree with me, Miss Somers?"

"Ask some one else, Mary: I have always been too busy to consider these points."

"It is a fact, that cannot be too soon or too strongly impressed upon you feminine creatures," broke in Mr. Ferrand, "that you *ought* to consult the judgment of those who know more of the world, and of human nature, than you can possibly do, in all that is important. The choice of servants *may*, perhaps, be safely left to your discretion,—the choice of husbands, never."

"But what can friends—male friends especially—know of my feelings? I, perhaps, am dying of love, and they know nothing about it. How *can* they judge for me?"

"‘Dying of love’ sounds very pretty and pathetic, but it is a mere figure of speech, my good sister: no one *does* die of love. But granted that circumstances and your feelings are a little adverse to each other, it must make no difference, your feelings will come all right in time. Nothing *can* set aside the necessity for obedience. It is the first great requisite in woman; and she may as well practise it as daughter and sister, before she is compelled to practise it as wife."

A perfect clamour broke about Mr. Fer-

rand's ears ere he had concluded. Mary Earle's countenance was in a perfect glow of indignation, more especially when Sir Thomas begged to express his entire concurrence in what Mr. Ferrand had been saying.

"I don't mean to obey my husband, and he need not expect it," she gasped out, eyeing the two gentlemen most angrily as she spoke.

And so, with pleasant *badinage*, and lively chat, they made their way back to the Fairies' Parlour: and right glad to rest were they when they reached it. The damask was spread on the greensward, and seats of every available description brought round it. The ladies took off their bonnets and shawls, and suspended them on the trees. The wine-bottles were drawn out of the clear, bubbling spring, and gay laughs and jests circulated round, with the ices, and the jellies, the champagne and madeira. Never was refreshment more thoroughly enjoyed. Mary Earle's voice and laugh were continually heard from her place between Mr. Channing and Mr. Macdonald. Very smart raps upon the knuckles did she give to both her brother-in-law and Sir Thomas Chatterton, whom she could not forgive for desiring to make such Helots of women.

"I should be quite happy if I could pro-

voke you, Sir Thomas," she said, as he bowed low to some witty impertinence or other she addressed to him.

Splendid was the day: Italian sky could scarce surpass the azure vault, where the silver clouds seemed to lie and dream, so gentle was their motion. The grasshoppers were chithering merrily; the squirrels chasing each other, pursued by the children, who, as Liliás had predicted, were growing wearied and troublesome.

Every one must pay for their popularity with children; and Mabel was generally quite willing to pay the price, but scarcely to-day—they did so hang upon her, so insist on being noticed and caressed, that scarce any attention could she give to what was passing around her. Mr. Barry was beside her; (Liliás, in arranging the party sitting down to luncheon, had taken care of that): but conversation was out of the question. She now and then heard Mr. Maynard's voice: he was proposing that they should have a tent pitched in the forest, in humble imitation of the duke in the Forest of Arden.

"Where should we get our Jaques from?" inquired Charles.

"Don't you think Sir Thomas Chatterton

would represent the character very fairly?" asked Mary, with a malicious sparkle.

Again a low inclination of the head from Sir Thomas, and an inquiry, in his blandest tone—

"If the character of Rosalind was appropriated?—if not, I would suggest the fitness of my fair and witty antagonist assuming it. The Orlando," continued he, his keen eye falling on one and another of the gentlemen, "might, with every propriety, fall to the share of either our Scotch or American friend."

He had thrown down the gauntlet, and without an instant's delay, Mary Earle took it up. A shower, nay, a very storm of railery and badinage flew about him. All her woman's wit came to her aid—sharp as a needle and caustic too was she, but it mattered not; words rebounded from him like water from the glossy wing of the wild duck—like hail-stones from a roof. The man was perfectly invulnerable, and aggravated her beyond endurance, by his placidly amused countenance under it all.

"We must have lots of books," continued Mr. Maynard—"no newspapers and no post bag. We will fish in the pools and streams—" ("The ladies angle for lovers," interjected Sir

Thomas with a glance, which Mary returned with another);—"and shoot the water-fowl and herons—I fear there are no deer left. The botanists can botanize—the Doctor bring his microscope—Mr. Geary and Mr. Abney will, for the general edification, find

‘Tongues in trees—books in the running brooks—
Sermons in stones, and good in everything.’

The ladies will of course bring their knitting and wool-work, and with a little love-making, (we must *not* leave that condiment out,) I think we shall be vastly happy."

"But what is to be done on rainy days?" asked Mr. Ferrand.

"We might possibly be somewhat at a loss, should such come—all save the lovers—they could look at each other and sigh."

"Will you be good enough to speak more respectfully of love, Mr. Maynard? I entertain a profound veneration for the sentiment," said Mary.

"So do I," replied he, "I look upon it as the salt of life."

"And I as the poetry of it"—"And I as the happiness of it"—"And I as the sunshine of it," came from one and another in tones of enthusiasm.

"And I," said the Doctor, raising his voice,

“look upon love as the *necessity* of life.
Now listen to me : we all know that

‘ The world’s a stage,
And all the men and women merely players.’

But I maintain that from our entrance to our exodus, love in some form or other is a necessity. It is life’s food, its pabulum, its aliment ; it ushers us into existence, tracks our footsteps through—it ministers at the death-bed, and receives the last faint sigh. Man’s intellect may shine clear and bright as do the stars, penetrating, searching into Nature’s arcana ; but cold, bleak, barren is it all ; his life half lived ; yearnings, longings irrepressible for something more—he knows not what ; because he does *not* know, or heed, that the soil in which genial emotions take root and grow, is lying quite untilled ; the affections, which are to refine and purify the whole man, make him a better citizen, friend and neighbour, have no room to grow, they need air, light, sunshine. “ Wisdom crieth aloud in the streets,” but Love cowers, droops with folded wing, and her voice is as that of the mourner. But so it is not always—man wakens up to the low sweet whisperings of affection. Soon he learneth a new language, in which fair woman is his teacher ; his books are

illuminated with her smile, and the light from her soft eyes falls on his heart, with gracious influences—sweet trammels are upon him, he is bound round with invisible fetters, and he would not again be free—‘For what is life without love?’ he asketh.

“Again I say, that love is a necessity of life. I could utter a very pæan of praise upon it, as the true Promethean fire, not stolen, but a gift to man; blessing and blessed, vivifying and vivified as it is: the sentiment which lifts us out of self, and evokes all that is best in our nature; the potent human lever whose mighty power is felt all over the world. It is a plane on which the peasant stands with the peer; the monarch, nor higher, nor more privileged than he of low degree. Lazarus stands foot to foot with Dives. Man’s heritage it is—his birthright—of which there is no Jacob to defraud him. It wings the hours with happiness here, it gives us a foretaste of the blessedness of Heaven, Love’s own abode.”

A general clapping of hands, and cries of *bravo! viva! viva!* testified to the pleasure which had been felt in listening to the Doctor’s earnest, almost impetuous delivery of his love homily.

“Why, Doctor, you are love’s own apostle,

and have quite proselyted me. I will fall in love directly, and I believe it will be with you; do shake hands with me? we must be warm friends from this very hour. You are a sensible, agreeable, nay, delightful creature; and if you will wait a few years—I don't mean to marry before six-and-twenty, I'm just eighteen now—we'll be married."

"Mary—Mary," exclaimed Lillas, half choking with laughter, "what is it you are talking about?"

"I am quite serious, quite, Lillas."

Sir Thomas here took out his tablets, and noted something down.

"Mind what you say, Miss Earle," warned Mr. Channing.

'A chiel's amang us takin' notes,

'An faith he'll prent it.'

Coolly added Sir Thomas,—“I believe, ladies and gentlemen, I understood Miss Earle aright; she specified six-and-twenty for the completion of her engagement with Dr. Merridan?” A general titter went round. “Thank you, there are thirty-three witnesses, I find. I never wish to be,—indeed I am generally *grieved* to be retained against ladies; but in the present instance, I beg leave to state that

you may command my services at any time, Dr. Merridan."

"I am sure you will have to take refuge in America, Miss Mary," said the American.

"With Orlando, of course," put in Sir Thomas.

Little did Mary reckon or care for the laugh that rose against her, so busied was she in complimenting the Doctor. She just turned aside and plucked a handful of the fragrant, flowery thyme, and threw it towards the too-provoking Sir Thomas. He took up a spray and placed it in his coat.

"Nay, Miss Earle, I am not to be bribed even by these flowery favours—the law must take its course, and it can reach even to America."

Mary would not hear. "Well, Doctor, I really did not suppose that we had any wiser than the 'wise men of Gotham' present, till you spoke in that eloquent and charming way. But now tell me, you soothing man, what *is* the reason you have never married?"

"The plot thickens, there is most abundant evidence; shall we rise and leave them to a *tête-à-tête*?" inquired Sir Thomas, of Lilies, who was suffocating with laughter.

"Because if you do believe and think as you say you do, about love, why you afford

the sublimest specimen of human self-cheatery I ever met with. You say, love is vital to man's happiness; *yet* you have never married."

Sir Thomas acted the part of Picador to the Doctor, from Mary's home thrusts; but she returned to the charge again and again. He pleaded destiny as a reason for not marrying.

"I do not see yet, O Doctor; wise men, such as you undeniably are, fashion their own destiny."

"That is a most sensible and pertinent observation of Miss Earle's. Wise men *do* fashion their own destiny," observed Sir Thomas, again coming to the rescue; "but not so with the gentler sex; their destiny is to obey, to be held in subjection. From the North Pole to the South, it reigns a universal law—forms the alpha and omega of woman's existence."

The broad-brimmed gipsy-hat, which was tied in the most coquettish fashion over her blooming cheeks, seemed to vibrate in sympathy with the pink parasol in her hand, as the obnoxious doctrine fell once more upon her ear.

"I do desire, Sir Thomas Chatterton, that

“you and I may be better strangers ; let’s meet as little as we can,” was Mary’s angry reply, accompanied by a glance of unutterable disdain.

“ Were you ladies aware,” went on Sir Thomas, looking round with a pleasant and benign countenance, “ that you lose all right to a distinctive name when you marry ? For instance, Miss Mary Earle, on the day she forfeits her freedom, will lose *that* name without acquiring any other. She will be simply Mary the wife of ——. Ha— may I beg the favour of your Christian name, Dr. Merridan ? Thank you. Mary the wife of Luke—herself a nullity—without even a name save from courtesy. All identity and individuality lost, merged in that of her lord.”

“ I don’t believe it,” said Mary, coolly, drawing patterns on the damask, with said pink parasol.

“ It is really scandalous,” observed Lilius ; “ the husband seems to be considered, in law, something analogous to a comet, blazing away in any orbit that he chooses, whilst the wife answers to a poor little star, just dimly visible in the glory of his magnificent tail.”

Sir Thomas pronounced it an exceedingly apt illustration of Mrs. Ferrand’s ; but argued

that the matter was more evenly balanced than appeared on the surface. If the wife did not share in the dignity, neither did she in the responsibility; the husband was held accountable for all his wife's deeds that fell short of actual crime."

It led to quite a learned discussion, in which nearly all the married men joined. It is scarcely believable that the horrid, overbearing creatures said, "that the laws, so far from being relaxed, should be made more stringent upon women; to protect *them*, forsooth, against women's encroachments."

Considerable amusement was excited by a somewhat elderly lady stating it as her belief,

"That British women never would have justice done them, till there was a House of Lords composed of ladies."

In vain had Mr. Barry tried to divert the attention of those teasing children from Mabel; in vain their nurse's endeavour to coax them away; Baby was riotous with the fun of clasping his fat arms round her neck, and scrambling over her in true baby fashion: and she was getting really impatient, when the little fellow all at once laid his head down on her lap, and went off to sleep, wearied out.

"It would be a pity to disturb him," she

said, " he should just lie still where he was."

Perfectly beautiful the child looked, with soft, ringletty curls shading his fine crimson cheek, and snowy, veined eyelids ; and such an air of innocence and repose about his sweet cherub face and attitude.

" Would not Miss Somers make an exquisite picture, now, with little Frank on her knee ?" asked, *of course*, Mary Earle ; " is there no one here who can sketch her ? You sketch, I know, Mr. Abney."

" We lack Miss Somers's permission," he replied, gravely.

" Indeed, I should not grant it," said Mabel, colouring.

" Excuse me, Mr. Abney, but it was really very *stupid* of you to make that remark. You should have taken your sketch, and said nothing about it. We should all have been glad of a copy, as a *souvenir* of this day in the forest."

" We shall doubtless have other *souvenirs*," said that tormenting voice, close in her ear.

The party at length rose and divided into groups and knots. Mr. Barry also rose, but it was only to stand and chat with Mabel, who was fast prisoned with Baby. Now, he had

her at 'vantage; not once during the scrambling stroll they had taken had her arm rested on his; scarce, even, had he met her glance; but no way discouraged was he—fine felicity was his.

“Mine you are, and mine you shall be, Mabel Somers; in vain, aye, all in vain, would you seek to free yourself; you are bound with a love-link chain, whose end is in my hand—vassal and bondwoman to me, who, in this, my hour of triumph, would fain lay myself down at my captive's feet, and ask her to do with me as she will.”

Such were his thoughts; such, perhaps, might be the eloquent language of his eye, for Mabel feared its love challenge: perhaps was fearful of her own responding to it.

Their talk was of anything but that whose subtle essence was permeating their whole being; they were discussing English scenery—the moorland, woodland, sweet pastoral—such as our own dear land shows forth through all her borders. Mabel was expressing her delight in quiet, lone hill sides; and she began to tell him about being once seated in the midst of such, on a wide ‘Chase’—a sort of sea of gentle eminences, very still and lonely.

“Was it in England, Miss Somers?”

“Yes—not far from here. There were no trees, save a few Scotch firs on the highest hills. Do you admire Scotch firs, Mr. Barry?”

“Not much—they are too rugged.”

“Yes; but the tree has beauty peculiar to itself, with its harsh, red visage, and sombre green. Where was I? O, I know. Some of the hills were very steep, and dark-looking, from being covered with ling; but most were just gentle slopes. Do you believe in Fairies? Ah! I see you do not, but I do fully; firm faith have I in fairy king and elfin queen, in gnomes and sylphs, and Robin Goodfellow—in ‘delicate Ariel,’ and all the rest of them; but seen one with golden quiver and arrow, or mounted on fairy palfrey, have I never; yet not the less do I believe that some day I shall come upon Fairyland. Where was I in my story? I keep losing the thread of it.”

“You were on soft, gentle slopes,” he said, with a half-worshipping glance at her beaming face.

“Yes,—well, they are just the places for Fairies’ meetings on moonlight nights;—for gossip, or frolic, or waltzing in their airy robes, and flowery diadems. Fairies *do* waltz of course, Mr. Barry,—yet there seemed but few flowers, and fewer birds, for such a wide-

spread place: it was not a dreary scene, but inexpressibly lonely and still."

"But, Miss Somers, you were surely not alone in a spot such as you describe?"

"No;—others were with me, in call but not in sight," she said, with a fading of her happy smile. "I was seated, book in hand,—the skeleton of a sheep, blanched by sun, and wind, and rain, to perfect whiteness, lay close to me; the sun was shining down without the shade of a single intervening leaf; the stillness was perfect. Suddenly, something which left me no power to move or speak, came overshadowing me; awe, which seemed to fill my very soul, pressed me down—the awe of something, invisible, intangible, but most real; which was wrapping me round,—it neither spoke nor touched, *yet sealed me*. Some higher nature was for a little in contact with my own, and carried me, where I know not—but with it I went; that is, my inmost self went, was taken, as a hand is taken out of a glove. The thrall was broken by *his* voice—my father's calling me.—There are no landmarks; nothing would show where I lay and dreamed; yet should I like to go again."

"But, not alone!" said the lover, eagerly;

"you should have one with you to share in your high thoughts and imaginings."

"Not one;" she said with a conscious smile, "not even such a little lamb of the human fold as this," lightly touching the sleeping child with her jewelled finger. "Baby, dear baby, *when* will you wake? I hear mischievous Mary Earle talking about dancing."

And soon after Baby did awake, and rewarded her by such a glad sweet smile, as she bent over, and gazed into his bold, bright eyes. Soon was he on his feet, as alert as any bird.

"There seems to be an immense amount of love-making going on in this part of the world," said *the* debonair voice, (which to Mary Earle was hoarse as a raven's) near to where she was standing with three or four gentlemen fluttering round her. "Cupid wonderfully busy; but the ladies taking the intuitive, and making marriage proposals, is to me quite a new and noteworthy circumstance."

Sharp and bitter as the east wind she looked. "I wish I could find a place to live in where there are none of you horrid men. I'd go to the Antipodes to-morrow if it would help me, but there, you swarm like bees in a hive.—

What am I to do? I verily believe I shall turn Nun," she added, looking round upon them with an air of the utmost disgust.

"*That*, under existing circumstances, is not feasible, Miss Earle," remarked Sir Thomas; "the engagement you have to-day entered into, does away with the possibility of your entering a nunnery."

"Oh that tintintabulary voice! Is any one inclined for a journey to Central Africa—or California—I don't care which—I'll join them with the greatest pleasure, if they are."

Whilst they were thus bandying jests, the Doctor sauntered towards Lillas, and stood chatting with her.

"I see whom you are looking at, Doctor," said Lillas with a smile; noticing how his glance kept turning towards Mabel and Mr. Barry; "I rather fancy you may expect to hear some particular intelligence soon."

"Ah! is it so?" he exclaimed with a sudden, earnest, interested gaze towards them; "then that accounts for Mr. Barry dropping down as it were from the clouds amongst us; of course I have had my suspicions, Mrs. Fer-rand, for

'Came I early, came I late,
I found him ever at the gate;'

and I've lived long enough to know, that for every effect there's a cause."

"But you must not run away with wrong impressions. There is no engagement at present; though they look very much at this moment as if there soon would be."

Just as she spoke, a sudden movement of the lover showed Mabel's most speaking face: a smile was dimpling, as she listened with upraised eyes to what he was saying.

"Yes, yes, there's no rejection in that look. How like she is to her father!"

Dim grew the Doctor's gaze, and faltering his voice, as he asked—

"*Can* he be worthy of her?"

"Why, *that* is a question I should be inclined to ask of any addressing themselves to Mabel. But she herself must be the judge. She is not one to be either teased or flattered into liking."

"But she is very young to form a binding engagement."

"So she is, Doctor; but then she is neither thoughtless nor impulsive. And again; her position is a very solitary one. We have seen much of Mr. Barry, and we all like him. But whether he is worthy of Mabel, is another matter. *She has no faults.*"

The downright dogmatical way in which Liliás spoke, called up a smile on the Doctor's face.

"Good as she may be—and good she is, I know, yet we must remember that there are spots in the sun; and she doubtless has faults, like all the rest of us, though, what they are, I have never been able rightly to make out."

"Then you and I agree entirely: Mabel *must* have faults—no one is without them—but what they are, we have yet to find out. Perhaps Mr. Barry may enlighten us by-and-by.—I declare, my giddy sister is proposing a polka!"

The day had been one of great heat; the thin, blue, rarefied air, trembling and wavering perceptibly to the eye; but now the sun was sinking, and the autumnal haze beginning to gather, which Liliás pointed out to her sister, when that unquiet young lady proposed dancing.

There was a somewhat different grouping of the party in driving home. Liliás told Mabel "That she did not quite approve of that narrow exclusive feeling which prompted the desire to always have her own people about her. And, as some little corrective to it, she should place Mr. Barry beside her."

Charles looked at her almost with a frown ; but Liliass was looking elsewhere, with a very *dégagé* sort of smile, which told him at once that her intention was to do despite to him—vex him.

“ I cannot manage my wife at all, Dr. Merridan,” he said to the Doctor, who was standing by ; “ can you give me any hints as to conjugal discipline ? ”

“ Indeed, Mr. Ferrand, I always believed that you had been a very fortunate man in marriage ! ”

“ Well, I thought so myself till lately ; but she is now so headstrong that I know not what to do with her.”

“ Quite right—*very right* indeed,” said a spirited voice near.

“ Ah, Mary ! is that you ? You will require a rod of iron to keep you in subjection when you wed.”

“ No Helotry for me. I shall handle the rod myself, and vigorously too.—I declare the Doctor’s standing by, and I fear, not the least deaf ! I had *rather* you had not heard that little indiscretion of mine, after our troth-plighting to-day—but you must forget it again. Miss Calvert, will you kindly change carriages with me ? There is the most agreeable party

possible in this one: Sir Thomas Chatterton you will find courtly, polite—nay, fascinating; he carries about with him a very elixir of pleasantness. If I were not *engagé* to Dr. Merridan, I should certainly make love to him, he is such a delectable creature!”

With a look and manner of the most audacious impertinence, she assisted the somewhat quakerly Miss Calvert into the seat reserved for herself, Sir Thomas, with the urbanest smile, and most mellifluous tone, asking “if she were going to play propriety beside the Doctor.”

“It was the funniest nutting party she had ever been at,” said Mary as they drove off; “she did not believe a single nut had been gathered.”

“There may be nuts to crack from it, nevertheless, Miss Earle,” observed the enemy, as he waved her an adieu.

Mr. Abney declined joining them at dinner, at Beechwood, on the plea of a direful headache; he would return to Somerton alone, as all the others were staying.

In vain Mabel essayed to change his resolution, on the ground of Aunt Abney’s admirable *tisane* for removing headache—it would relieve it at once—it never failed.

"Now do *not* go, Philip, it is so wretched for you to be alone when you are suffering. We *must* get him wedded, must we not, Mrs. Geary?"

With sisterly frankness had she called him Philip, and looked in his face as she spoke, but no smile answered her; an expression of the deepest dejection rested on his countenance.

"I am afraid he is very ill, Doctor," said Mabel, gazing anxiously after him as he drove away.

"I will see him before the night closes," answered the Doctor, who had formed his own opinion about the nature of Philip's malady.

"Do, if you please," said Mrs. Geary; "we have thought him looking ill, and depressed in spirits for some time."

"We *will* get him married," said Mabel. "You and I, dear Mrs. Geary, will set about the matter without delay, and you must help us, Doctor. It is so very sad and dreary for him to have no one to tend and care for him, when ill."

"Hadn't we better inquire first whether he wishes to marry?" suggested the Doctor.

"Do *you* always or *ever* ask your patients whether they would *like* the medicine you pre-

scribe for them?" asked Mabel with a bright merry face, as she ran up the steps, and bounded in to the hall.

A message requesting Mr. Ferrand's presence in Mrs. Ferrand's dressing-room, reached him a few minutes before dinner; with a profound curtsy, demure face, and the meekest tones, did she request the favour of his opinion on her costume, ere she went to the drawing-room.

Very amused Charles looked as he pronounced her appearance wholly unexceptionable; he threw in an agreeable compliment or two, which need not be repeated here. Another reverential curtsy from her, and humbly worded thanks for his great condescension in approving. Sadly at variance with her self-abasing manner was the malicious sparkle of her fine large eyes, which were uttering the most rebellious things whilst her tongue was discoursing with such wifely meekness.

"Come, come, my Lily, give the spite, words. You know your heart is full of it; let it have way and be comfortable," said Charles, as he fondly stroked her glossy hair.

Thus evoked it did find way, and a proper scolding she gave him for his incivility to her

in the Forest. Charles readily acknowledged that he had been in the wrong—that he had been unwarrantably rude to her ; it was the amplest atonement—Lilias forgave him instantly.

When they entered the drawing-room together, a few minutes after, Lilias's face was beaming with good temper and animation.

Much conversation was there between Mabel and Mrs. Geary, about that poor erring girl, Ruth Collins. Only after very serious reasoning with by Mr. Abney, had her mother consented to receive her under her roof ; the natural love of the parent seemed turned to gall and wormwood, with the shame her child had brought on her.

“She could not bear it, she could *not* bear the scorn that would be heaped upon them, now ; they that till now had always borne a good name.”

In rapidest vehemence her words poured out in reply to Mr. Abney's gentle pleading for the wretched child ; well nigh frantic with grief was she ; thanking God that her husband had not lived to see that day ; telling, how she could have borne to see Ruth in her coffin ; but could *not* bear to see her, without character or good name.

Impossible was it to do other than sympa-

thise with the afflicted mother, whose brown hair became in a few days grey, nay white ; and whose grief seemed to have heaped sudden years upon her.

“Poor thing,” said Mrs. Geary, “it is very hard for her, after all her painstaking and striving, and pride in her good name, to have it all swept away so suddenly ; but I fear she is very stern with Ruth ; I hear that she does not allow her to take her meals with the rest, nor has she ever spoken to her, nor let the others ; though they could hear Ruth sobbing half the night through.”

A gay party filled the rooms that evening ; Liliás was gossiping with everybody ; Mary Earle laughing with everybody — even with Sir Thomas, and gaily accompanied those who played and sang, with her favourite instrument, the tambourine ; which she struck in the most piquant fashion, and drew around herself a mob of those “horrid men,” as she termed them.

Charles and Liliás sat chatting over the fire, after their guests had departed ; and Charles administered a quiet scold, for Liliás having that day departed from proper caution in so markedly placing Mr. Barry and Mabel together.

“ The matter is evidently passing quite out of my jurisdiction ; but still, Lillas, till it is openly avowed and acknowledged—a fact, have nothing at all to do with it. By the way, I fancied, from something Barry said to me the other day, that he knew of Major Berners’s dismissal. Has any one told him of it ? ”

No answer was vouchsafed to this direct question.

“ Did *you* tell him, Lillas ? ”

She raised her eyes and laughed, whilst Charles looked absolutely stern.

“ I am both displeased and wounded, to find that you have so wholly disregarded my wishes, paid so little attention to the injunction that I gave you, to keep from interfering either for Mr. Barry or against him.”

“ Don’t scold so, Charley. I really felt very sorry for him whilst Mabel was at the Manor —(you know you remarked yourself how miserable he seemed), and so I—I just told him about the Major.”

“ And of course there has been an understanding between you ever since ? ”

Again Lillas laughed ; but Charles was so angry as not to be easily appeased ; and she was most provoking, sitting gazing into the fire, pretending to look very penitent, whilst

her saucy mouth had something to do, to hold back a smile. Charles said a good deal more than he meant to say,—more, indeed, than the occasion called for; dealt out a few reflections upon the sex in general, and Lillas in particular, far from flattering. He began himself at length to think he had said enough, and came to a stand-still, and there was dead silence in the room. Lillas neither looked up nor spoke.

Not quite comfortable, but keeping his ground, he put the inquiry,—“If she were not sorry for having so disregarded his wishes?”

“Yes, very sorry, dear Charles,” said the same meek voice he had heard before during the day.

“Well, as you are really sorry, I’ll say no more about it. I did not mean to speak angrily to you.”

He having laid down his arms, Lillas took up hers, and insisted that he should at once ask her forgiveness,—that he should entreat and pray for it.”

A little longer spirited discussion upon the matter, in which Charles got worsted, most decidedly, and Lillas grew quite triumphant: immoderately she laughed, and pronounced it “quite *charmante*.”

“ Now, that you would like to quarrel with me, you know quite well : that you would delight in it, revel in it : it would do you infinite good. But I won’t quarrel with you : it takes two persons to quarrel, and I am not in the humour—far from it. In a particularly comfortable mood do I feel, and don’t wish it to be disturbed.—There, now that you smile, and lay aside that horrid hectoring way, I have no objection to tell you that you are quite right, and I wrong. I will forgive *you* for being right, you pardon me for being wrong, and that settles the matter. The best of wives am I, as I have often remarked before.”

Charles laughed,—what else could he do ? What chance has a quiet, sensible man with a creature who won’t listen to reason, and happens to be his wife ? It is against the laws of the realm to beat her into conviction, equally so to hale her to the judgment-hall for contempt and contumacy. No redress is there for a husband,—no Court of Appeal against a wife’s passive resistance and stubbornness. “ It is naught, it is naught,” she crieth, demurely and humbly.

Lilias carried off the honours of the combat with anything but angelical meekness ;

and, after laughing till she was weary, said,—

“Come a little nearer, Charles, and I will whisper something to you.”

He advanced his chair, and she whispered a few words, which made him, in turn, laugh, and laugh heartily.

“Nonsense, Lillas: it is not true.”

“Quite—quite, I assure you. I stake my woman’s penetration on its truth. Several times I have noticed it, when sitting near to her, and he has come in the room, or come to speak to her, quite quick and hurried her breathing has got, fluttering again; and her voice has changed so—very sweet, you know, but disturbed sounding. But it is really scandalous that I should tell you Mabel’s secret, even though wives *do* tell everything to their husbands. Is it not acting a traitorous part, Charles?”

“It is, indeed, Lillas. You deserve—let me think what you deserve. What would be a fitting punishment for your perfidy?—You deserve stoning; nothing less than stoning would be sufficient,” he repeated, with an urbane smile.—

Exit Charles, leaving Lillas with a sufficiently comic expression of face.

Riding parties were in great favour at Beechwood. A dozen of those gay young people would gallop together over hill and dale, in the wildest spirits,—Mary Earle the life and soul of all, teasing the gentlemen, coquetting with them, laughing with them, and *at* them pitilessly, but ever putting on her prettiest behaviour in Dr. Merridan's presence, sitting beside him demure and quiet, as became an engaged young lady, save now and then nature *would* show itself, and her wit flashed out at somebody or other who came in her way. The Doctor entered into the jest in most good-natured fashion.

Mary was an admirable horsewoman. Marvellous was it to see such a *petite* slight creature mastering a high-mettled thorough-bred, who, rearing and plunging, would try in every way to unseat her. She was certain to get the fiery-tempered creature under control, and make it obey her. Few horses were spirited enough to please her; speed was a very minor virtue in her estimation.

"I'm as yet only in training," she said, with much nonchalance, to some gentlemen who was complimenting her on her equestrian powers. "I have commenced with horses—pretty well to begin with—but it is only to

teach me how to manage a husband when I condescend to take one."

The Doctor was standing near: jocular was his look and voice, as he said,—

"I give you fair warning, Miss Mary, that I shall be far from content to sink into a mere Marionette."

Gleefully she turned to him.

"Never you fear, Doctor; you are not of the stuff of which Marionettes are made. Cedar and heart of oak are no materials for puppets, *mon ami*. Don't think for a moment that I shall be turbulent with *you*. Your exceeding good sense and good feeling would tone down and tame down the wildest: quiet as a—a hen-quaker will you find me. No *Via Dolorosa* marriage will ours be; but a primrose-path, fringed with hearts'-ease and balsams."

"With nettles and thistles, rather," interpolated her brother-in-law.

"Angelica should go with *Marygold*," sighed out the American, whose fancy for her was growing serious.

Neither of the remarks would she condescend to notice, but wound up with a reverential curtsy to the Doctor, which he returned with a bow equally profound.

"Whosoever wants music, may bring to me either my tambourine or gittern," she said, settling herself into a low chair, with the air of an empress.

Some half-dozen were instantly on their feet.

"I don't think, Mary, I ever was such a madcap as you," observed Lillas one day when expostulating with her on some feminine misdemeanour or other.

"Worse, Lillas, a great deal worse, from all I hear about you," returned Mary, defiantly.

Lillas very prudently dropped the subject.

The autumn had deepened ere that merry party at Beechwood broke up. Laughing was the farewell Mary took of the Doctor.

"If *you* deceive me—if you play me false, I shall never, never put faith in man again. So look to it, O Doctor."

Miss Lancaster's furlough had expired, and she returned to her duties. Renewed health and spirits had come with the change; the look of proud, uncomplaining depression passed away from her face. Kindly was the welcome she received from one and all: cordial the greeting.

CHAPTER XVII.

"I lay my heart before thee,
Lay it, darling, at thy feet."

AYTOUN.

SINGULARLY cheerful and pleasant, brilliantly lighted, and comfortable, looked the drawing-room at Beechwood, where they were all assembled; Mr. Abney the only addition to the usual circle. The ladies were all occupied with some graceful employment or other; even Lilius, who commonly preferred conversation, or reading, or just sunning herself beside a heaped-up fire, more than using her fingers, was now hemming, or embroidering, some muslin busily.

Standing before Mabel was an elegant pannier basket—the gift of the poor witless—filled with vivid-coloured Berlin wools, which Mr. Barry seemed doing his very best to hopelessly entangle, whilst he watched her fingers inweave the brilliant dyes in the canvas. Mabel had chidden him more than once, for the mischief he was perpetrating, with very

little effect, it is true; for he still persisted in it, that he might compel her to look up at him with the glance so full of spirit and beauty, with the eyes so full of struggling love, and consciousness, as they were.

In truth, he was punishing her; and she deserved it, richly deserved it, at his hands. Grant him an opportunity of seeing her alone, she would not: she fled him—shunned him—'twas intolerable. Well might he play the tyrant, and bring the warm blood quick rushing over the beautiful cheek, which had grown so bashful and so shy, Yet was he well content with the exquisite joy that was his own, (and well he might be;) and for the rest, he knew she could not long elude him; pay him a thousand fold for it all she should, when the hour, *the* hour of his life did come.

Mr. Abney had been reading aloud to them from "Grant's Romance of War;" and a little discussion ensued upon the characters of the hero and heroine.

Lilias was somewhat severe upon the facility with which Ronald transferred his affections. Mr. Ferrand justified: Mr. Abney palliated. Lilias warmed to the combat at once; her work was thrown aside, and her handsome face lit up at the happy prospect of a little argumen-

tation and wordiness : dearly did she love it ; gradually one and another were drawn into the discussion—the feminine voices were decidedly against the hero, and Mr. Barry condemned him : but Mabel had not spoken : and Liliás at length challenged her for her opinion on the lover's inconstancy.

"Indeed, Liliás," was the reply, with the most simple *naïf* look and voice imaginable ; "I am so ignorant of the love code of morality, that I have no opinion to give—nothing to say."

"Then, if you have nothing to say, say it," returned Liliás with a provoked pettish air.

The laugh had scarcely subsided, when there came a request from Mr. Ferrand's butler, to be allowed to speak with his master. Charles arose and went into the hall with him.

"There was something very odd to be seen in the sky," Thornhill said with a droll, frightened face ; "some of the servant women thought the judgment-day was coming, and were almost ready to go into fits ; would his master be so good as to tell them what *he* thought it was?"

Charles stepped out on the lawn, and beheld a magnificent scene. The north and north-west heavens were glowing with incar-

nadined light—not telluric, but of the heavens, heavenly, and the stars shone through it. A soft crimson sea, whose rippling waves of glory rushed up to the very zenith—now flushing with intensest dye, then paling, dimming, dying away. Banners—not golden oriflammes, but standards whose hue was of the rose’s heart—were upheld, unfurled—fold after fold flung out, borne hither and thither by some heavenly armament ; they proudly waved and streamed, as faint auras caught them ; in fantastic play they undulated : then their soft folds closed, and they were gone. Yet leaping only from point to point, *there* they come again with a rushing triumph, ardent as before, flickering, quivering, pulsating.

A soft hand was laid on Charles’s arm, as he stood lost in admiration of the unusual scene.

“Is it the Aurora?” Liliás asked.

“Yes, and very splendid ; but don’t stand shivering there : go and get a shawl on, and tell the others.”

Soon, all were standing out in the crisp, sharp October night air, gazing upwards at the unwonted scene. “Be careful to keep your shawl well about you, Mabel,” said her ever-careful Aunt ; “you had better walk

about a little, my love : you will feel the cold the less."

All moved slowly up and down the broad walk, and began to talk learnedly about the Aurora Borealis, and Magnetism, and so on. Mabel's arm was resting in Wymonde's; and they got a little behind the others: indeed, the walk was scarce wide enough for all. Some remark was made by her about the pretty term of the Shetlanders for the Northern Lights—that of "The merry dancers in Heaven."

'Tis probable that she spake low, for the lover's head bent down to catch her accents, as it did also, when he spake again. Her ungloved, dimpled hand, that gleamed from very whiteness, lay upon his arm; a resistless impulse came, to daringly press it with his own—yes, to press it with his own—to dare *so* much; so he clasped it: round, his fingers went, gently, persuasively, beseechingly as it were; then his clasp tightened, for *her* hand resisted not—spurned not his, but trembled, thrilled, under its pressure—nay, she trembled altogether, as she hung upon his arm.

"Mabel—dear, dear Mabel," was softly whispered in low, passionate accents.

"My dear love, I am so afraid you will take

cold; let me persuade you to return to the house," said Mrs. Abney at that most inopportune moment.

"We had better all go in, I think, it is really very cold," exclaimed Lillas, with a shiver.

So they all returned to the fireside, and the conversation resumed its sprightly, cheerful tone; but Mabel was much quieter than usual; her frank, gay manner had departed, she bent over her wool-work as if quite engrossed by it.

After a while, Mr. Abney asked her to sing; a rare thing was it for Mabel to decline; but she did so now: playfully excusing herself, on the ground of wishing to talk to him about some weighty matters concerning Somerton: so he took a chair beside her, and they conversed in an undertone for the remainder of the evening. Not once did her glance turn towards her lover: he might not have been in the room.

But the good-night came; then, hand was in hand, eye met eye, beneath his full, searching, asking gaze, hers sunk, drooped at once, and over her clear, bright face, over cheek and brow, and snow white throat, quick flowed the crimson current.

Lovingly did the sun lie on Mabel's glossy braids, as she, the next morning, sat in the window-seat of her drawing-room,—ever did she love basking in the sun.

“Change of work is as good as play,” I hear the cottagers' wives say to their children, she observed, with a smile to Mrs. Abney; as restlessly throwing aside some crochet, she took a prolonged gaze down on that sweet bowery garden, lying beneath her windows; and said something about going out presently.

“And you must go out with me, Auntie dear; you know, ‘we must gather roses whilst we may;’ and we shall not have many such days as these.”

Mrs. Abney said, if she would wait half an hour she would accompany her; so Mabel took up her embroidery the while. She was working a group of flowers on coarse canvas; and an expanded magnolia was now occupying her needle: beautifully executed was it with finely blended colouring and artistic nicety of shade and stitch.

But wild was the work made of that same
• magnolia, with tendrils the most heterogeneous, branching out in all directions, when Mrs. Ferrand, accompanied by Mr. Barry, entered the room. Some time did Liliat sit, chatting in

her own sprightly fashion, as only a frank, happy, intelligent woman *can* chat: when she at length rose, she said—

“I wish you would come and assist my judgment in the choice of some silks, Mrs. Abney? they must be returned to-day, and Charles thinks I have such bad taste in dress. So do come and help me choose?”

Commend us to a woman for a friend, say we.

With much alacrity Mrs. Abney accompanied her out of the room, and the two were left. For a minute there was unbroken silence; but then, Wymonde, who was seated on the opposite side of the table, got up, came round, and drew a chair near to Mabel. Quietly enough did he do it; 'tis ever your decided men who are quiet.

The proceeding was an unusual one, but Mabel never once looked up; eye, hand, and sole attention were given to the magnolia, which was rapidly assuming a most fantastic appearance. Scarce could his voice be recognised, so full of deep emotion was it, when his words found way.

“May I speak, will you hear me *now*, Miss Somers? Long have I waited, and scarce patiently, for this hour coming—the hour when

I might lay open to you my whole heart ; show you, how from the very first hour we met, it has mirrored *your* image. It has come at last, and I pass not from your presence till I learn from your lips, whether the fond dream I have cherished may be realized—with *you* it begins—with you it ends—'tis of a home shared with you, Mabel, dear Mabel Somers—forgive my rash tongue *so* calling you, I pray—I love you ! yes, with my whole being, and for my whole life, do I love you. *Can you love me ?*”

No ear, save the intense listening one of love, could catch the question which he put, so mastered was his voice by o’erwhelming feeling.

She spoke not—moved not ; the magnolia had fallen to the floor, her face was buried in her hands, her heart beating like a newly-prisoned bird’s.

“Mabel, dearest Mabel ; not alone my ear, my heart is waiting, listening for some blessed words ; will you not speak them ?—chide me for impatience if you will ; but speak them ? Ah ! deny them not to such love as mine ?”

Speak she did not ; nay, she could not. So the lover growing bold and daring, made himself master of one of the little hands which enviously hid her sweet glowing face from his

desiring eyes : and more daring still, not only one, but two, were soon fast clasped in his own.

What could she do? Her gentle bosom rose and fell tumultuously. She felt his burning gaze, even through her downcast lids. *What could she do?* One glance she stole from under her silken lashes at her lover, she saw his countenance agitated with appealing and excessive passion; with vehement and yet trembling hope; and seeing this, the sweet and most womanly girl yielded herself to him; with a sigh, a struggle of quick passionate breath, she hid her face, blushes and all, on her lover's breast.

Faltering, murmuring joy-accents, rapturous words, blessings, his arm enfolded her; his lip pressed hers.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“All heaven in his exulting heart.”

How much had he to tell her, when they steadied sufficiently from that gentle delirium for him to speak, and Mabel to listen.

“I have been patient—very patient; you know not, nor can imagine the self-control I have exercised; but this—this hour repays me for it all. I have felt you were my fate, my destiny, that follow you, I must; and if man could, win you, and bind up our two separate threads of life in one. I have believed you an angel—don’t smile, my precious one—lent to earth for a time; but that, if man sought to possess you, fly away you would to some heavenly abode, alone meet for you. But you *are* human, Mabel; when I pressed your beating heart to mine, I knew it—was sure of it, for it throbbed so. This little hand which I have so feared to grieve by unwelcome pressing, *is* flesh and blood; a woman’s soul looks out of those sweet eyes; I now *may* gaze into

them and not offend you. You are an earth-born creature, Mabel, you do not shrink or fly from earthly love. You are not too ethereal for mine.

"*You are mine*—yes, you *are* mine—I am clasping you to me, and you repulse me not.

"I have dreamed of you, night and day : now, you are no longer a dream ; you are my life's own—scarce another—one with it. You love me—not, perhaps, as I love you ; but you love me. Your tongue has syllabled the words—your eyes confirmed them."

His lip was tremulous with excessive eagerness ; his most earnest eyes questioned hers continually, that he might be sure there was no illusion, that his exquisite bliss was real. Almost faint was he with overmastering joy. How long they had sat there, hands linked and hearts bounding together, they could not tell ; they cared not. Time was not to be guaged by dial or clock, with pulses beating as theirs were.

But at length came a gentle rap at the door, and, after an interval, a second, before Mabel found voice to say, "Come in." It was Lillas. A smile was mantling on her lips as she entered and walked up to them.

"Joy, Mrs. Ferrand, wish me joy ! Mabel

is my own!" cried the lover, with such an ardent, flushed face.

"I do with all my heart congratulate you both," said she, giving him her hand; and then, turning to Mabel, kissed her again and again.

"Are you *very* happy, darling Mabel?" she asked.

Mabel's answer was a glance to her lover, and placing her hand in his. *His* joy found utterance in quick, passionate, though somewhat incoherent words. Mabel's was still and quiet; she looked, but did not speak it.

With a woman's perceptive sympathy, Lillas talked to them both: she did not jest, for she saw how full their hearts were. At last she put the inquiry,—

"Do you two happy people know how long you have been left alone? can you believe that it is three mortal hours since Mrs. Abney and I quitted the room?"

"It is not possible, Lillas!" exclaimed Mabel, starting up. But she was no longer her own to come and go: gently did the lover's hand draw her down again beside him.

"One more half-hour with my betrothed, dear Mrs. Ferrand," pleaded he. "You, who have been such a kind friend to me, will, I am sure, grant me *this*."

“ But does Mabel wish it? I must not have her tyrannized over, Mr. Barry.”

“ Tell Mrs. Ferrand, my Mabel, that you do wish it.” Quickly was the suppliant becoming the dictator.

“ Yes, one more half-hour,” asked Mabel, and Liliás again left them, noting the time on her watch, as also did Wymonde.

“ Then, Mabel, we are pledged to each other, are we not?” The hand he held pressed his in token of assent. “ From this hour you are my affianced wife, bound in truth, honour, love. Ours is no child’s play : we are recording vows whose force will endure as long as we do. For myself I say, that, come weal or woe, health or sickness, come chance or change as they may, I will never fail you, so long as God grants me life and power—so help me Him! You have committed your happiness to my hands and keeping : sacred is the trust ; I will be worthy of it, if man can.

“ Place your hands in mine ; press them warmly—still more warmly—and tell me whether you will trust to me, trust me altogether, my sweet betrothed—my realized dream—my fancy’s living embodiment, as you are. Let me feel your soft breath flutter on my cheek ! let me drink in love from your radiant eyes !

Mabel—*my* Mabel—I cannot say it enough—often have I seen your eyes fill with tears when speaking of orphans. Will you promise me that from this hour you will banish the thought of orphanhood from your heart—the word from your lips?”

“I do promise, Wymonde.”

“That you will let me be father, brother, lover, all in one? that you will still all yearnings for other than myself, that the affianced husband may feel that he fills your heart, to the exclusion of *all* regrets and sorrows? See how much I ask and require from you.”

Again came the hand pressure: well she understood him.

“Call me dear Wymonde, now, at once, Mabel! Quick—I am impatient.”

“To-morrow, let it be, *dear* Wymonde.”

“Thanks! thanks! Oh, day and hour thrice happy—and thrice memorable! Mabel, I could scarce feel more blissful, if it had given you to me at the altar, wedded, instead of plighted, my angel-hearted love; my peerless Mabel; the one love of my life, in whose affection I shall bask, as in warm, glad sunshine; in whose goodness my own feeble strivings will be greated and strengthened.

“Yes, now that I clasp you thus, warm,

breathing, I know that you are not an angel, but a woman, loving, and very good—with a fine, gracious heart, full of feeling and tenderness, who could make a home very nigh akin to heaven.

“Now, once more before we part, tell me that you are my own—that I am not deceiving myself. Whisper it to me, if you like not to speak it loud; say, ‘I love you, dear Wymonde.’ Nay, Mabel, Mabel, hold not back; make me happy; give me fond words—I am still athirst.”

Soft as the coo of the ring-dove was her voice, as she whispered some love-words in his ear.

“Now leave me, Wymonde; let me rest—I am *too happy*.”

Mr. Ferrand himself went to Somerton, to communicate the important tidings of Mabel’s engagement to those so deeply interested in hearing it.

“I rejoice that she has thus early found a resting-place for her young affections. God grant that he may be a continual blessing to her and to her people,” said Mr. Geary. “We will call upon her to-morrow, and offer our congratulations in person.”

“Does she seem very happy, Mr. Ferrand?”

inquired Mrs. Geary, quite roused out of her usual placid, almost *far niente* manner by the joyful announcement.

"She does, indeed, look a most happy creature, I assure you."

"God keep her so!" said the kind lady. "I cannot say that I am altogether surprised at what you have told us, for I formed my own opinion about the nature of Mr. Barry's attentions that day in the Forest, when they were talking so long together. I remember making a remark about it to Philip at the time."

"By the way, Mrs. Abney," said Charles, that evening, "you *must* persuade your nephew to go abroad for a time. He was at the Rectory to-day, when I called; and I thought I never saw any one look so wretchedly ill. The Gearys seem quite uneasy about him; they think he studies too hard. No matter, however late people may be kept up at night, they can always see *his* light burning. He will kill himself, if he goes on in this way. You must talk to him about it."

"I think *you* will have more influence than I shall, Mabel," said Mrs. Abney. "You must help me to persuade him to lay his studies aside."

"That I will; and we will take the Doctor into council also. The last thing to be tolerated would be our inestimable Philip falling into bad health. Suppose, Auntie, that we give him his choice—act generously: he may either go abroad, or get married. I am sure Philip *ought* to marry: it is so solitary for him."

Strongly did the Doctor advocate the proposition for Philip leaving Somerton for a time.

"But don't you think that it would be still better for him to marry first, and take his wife abroad with him?" asked Mabel, simply and earnestly.

A queer look passed over the Doctor's face.

"The prescription may be very good in itself, Miss Mabel, but I think it would be taking a monstrous liberty to urge it upon him."

"But if it would be for his own good," argued Mabel.

"You cannot do people good against their will," he answered, with a very crabbed look, and peremptory shake of the head to close the discussion.

"You must resist that young lady's encroachments whilst you may, Doctor," said Charles, quizzically; "I foresee quite well, that she is about to get up a sort of matrimonial

crusade, under her own banner, and will have you all in the ranks, if you don't take care."

A laugh arose, and Mabel turned away with a heightened colour and look of pique.

Mr. Barry accompanied Mabel and her aunt to Somerton church the first Sunday after their betrothal. All were on the watch; every eye turned in scrutiny upon the gentleman who was to marry their young lady. Opinions were soon formed, and freely given; all agreed on one point—"That he looked a gentleman born."

"He looked as if he knew his own mind," said some, whilst others observed—"That he had a proud air, though it changed to a very pleasant one when he smiled; they saw him smile several times at their young lady, bless her!"

Not far wrong were they in their criticism; he *had* a somewhat proud air—at least a high-born, distinguished mien and presence; his manly, well-built person had a dash of stateliness in step and carriage, and the same impress was stamped upon the intellectually shaped head and thoughtful brow.

"Does your nephew suffer from depression of spirits, Mrs Abney?" asked Wymonde, as they drove home.

"I am not aware that he does, though he looks so ill now, that I am becoming seriously uneasy about him."

"I asked you, for I thought his sermon, striking and beautiful as it was, had a great tone of sadness about it; he seemed to place *himself* in the position of the unprofitable servant, on whom he was dwelling."

"He is coming to us to-morrow, and Auntie and I mean to catechise him, and insist upon knowing what it is makes him look so wretchedly ill," said Mabel. She placed a light finger on her lover's arm, and whispered—"You will *so* like Philip."

"Nay, I'll worship him, if you bid me," was the rejoinder from eye and lip.

Philip dined at Beechwood the next day, and underwent the threatened questioning, which elicited *nothing*. Against the testimony of his altered appearance, against the positive convictions of his listeners, he persisted in saying that he was well,—required no change.

Whilst they were fain to forget their inquietude in the charm of his unobtrusive but most interesting conversation: Naturally did he seem to prefer serious subjects; and he possessed such varied richness of expression; such power of discussion, with such chastened use

of it ; so much grasp with so much humility and delicacy of mind, that the combination was felt to be as rare as it was pleasing.

As you marked how his cheek glowed ; how his meek eye spiritualized ; how deeply-earnest became the yet-ever-gentle look of the whole countenance, it seemed that he was—nay, must be—encompassed with such an atmosphere of good and peace, as sin and temptation could have no power to pass. And yet, though *he* was not tempted into wrong he could feel for you—an erring one—who were.

Something of this thought had doubtless crossed the mind of Liliās, for, looking at him with almost more than her usual frankness of expression, she said—

“You are scarce like others, Mr. Abney, I should think ; temptations would have no power to make you ever step aside.”

Remarkable was the sudden change in his countenance : there came a look of intense, shrinking pain, as though rude hand had jarred upon some exquisite nerve, and brought instant torture ; yet was it seen but for an instant ; the calm smile mantled again, as he said—

“ He feared the strife between the evil and the good principle ended only with life, in any of us.”

Many a gay, sportive jest, Liliás now indulged in at the expense of our two lovers: she amply compensated to herself, now the engagement was fully recognised,—was what she herself termed “ a fact,”—for the former compelled restraint, which had, in truth, been pain and grief to her. Laughing missiles from her ready wit flew about them constantly, not that they did any damage, for Wymonde was “ cunning of fence,” and parried them with admirable skill; ample care he took that not one should touch Mabel; he set himself before her as an impenetrable shield and buckler from all harm.

A shrewd suspicion had crept into Liliás’s quick mind, which found words in the following query, concerning which she craved an answer from either Mr. Barry, Miss Somers, or both:—

“ What sort of love-making is that which takes place under auroral skies? Does it differ materially from any other love-making? All know that twilight is a help to love, that moonlight ‘ makes the heart grow tender,’ and

that starlight is highly provocative; but it is wished to be known whether auroral light is very stimulant indeed?"

How the gushing confidence outpoured with our two lovers; how thought met thought, heart unfolded itself to heart, as by a spell! Triumphantly its course ran, youth and love's rejoicing current. Together were they alway. They sat together—he watching her every look and movement, whilst her eyes would rest upon him with the frankest, most beaming affection. They rode together—companioned only by the children on their Shetland ponies. They walked together, lost in the abundant rapture of being each other's—wholly given up to its exquisite bliss. Earth had become Paradise—bright, glorious as it was on the bridal morn of the first man and the first woman.

"Oh, sorceress, sorceress!" cried Wymonde, "I am become a slave."

And Mabel laughed her silver laugh, and vowed, "That a slave he should remain."

Dire was the dismay chasing the overflowing joy, when sudden tidings came of the alarming illness of Lady Barry, and requiring her son's immediate presence by her side.

Lady Barry's health had long been delicate,

but the previous winter, which she had, with her two unmarried daughters, spent at Rome, had seemed to re-invigorate it so much, as to allow her to take up her residence for the coming winter in the Isle of Wight; and there it was her son was summoned to her: his elder brother, the Hon. Sir Gerard Barry, being absent in Italy—indeed, he had taken up his permanent abode there, having contracted a matrimonial alliance with a beautiful and high-born Italian lady, whose love of her own sunny land amounted to passion, and who vowed, with a shudder, “That she could *not* live in such an hyperborean clime as that of England—the thought was most intolerable!” At present, the marriage was childless; therefore Wymonde, the second son, stood in the position of presumptive heir to the baronetcy.

Without intimating its contents, Wymonde laid his sister Athalah’s letter before Mabel. A quick glance, and her lip began to quiver; a vain effort she made to repress the tears—’twas fruitless, they began to fall, and she hid her face. In an instant was he at her feet, his arm wound round her, and passionately kissing her tears away.

“Little did I think, my own sweet, tender darling, that I should ever bless the day

which saw your tears flow as they are flowing now: pearls of price from Love's own fountain are they, welling forth for me—for me! Never *from* me shall you have deeper cause to weep. Believe you this, my love?"

Words of rapturous tenderness he poured into her ear—the fondest vows of undying love. And her smile won its way back—shone forth again.

"Shame—shame on me! the childish and the selfish! Will you not remember it against me, Wymonde? Will you forget it as though it had not been?"

"Never will I forget it, Mabel, never! So hope it not, my angel-hearted love!"

And before he leaves—for leave he must, before that day's sun has set—she must go with him to Somerton—"to her other home," he calls it. So together they go, and wander over the park, the gardens, the house. He at last stays her steps before her father's full-length portrait.

"Here have I meant to come with you, Mabel, and so, with your hand resting in mine, ask your father's blessing on our love. His eyes are resting on us now; his blood is coursing in your veins—do *you* ask him to bless us both."

Tremulous her voice, barely to be heard, as she prayed him to bless his children—his son, his daughter ; to bless and love them both.

“ May I deserve to have this one child of your love entrusted to my charge ! May I prove myself worthy of *her*, and of being your son ! May we, together, strive to tread in your steps—be fit to stand in your place ! ”

Before God and *him* did the lover bind his life to the ministering to his child’s happiness.

He led the sobbing Mabel to a chair, for she was wholly overcome. Long did he speak with her on the subject of her father ; and her sad secret lingering over his memory, with the deepest tenderness enter into it all—link himself in with it.

She rose up at last, her cheek glowing, though her eyes were yet full of tears, and pressing his hand fondly to her lips, questioned him as to whether he meant to make her love him *too* much—really too much.

“ I mean to make you rest on me, and trust to me, my beloved. Ah, Mabel ! Mabel ! what spousal virtues shall I not expect from *you*, who have been so faithful to the filial ? ”

CHAPTER XIX.

“Forget not thou hast often sinn’d;
And sinful yet may be,—
Deal gently with the erring one,
As God has dealt with thee.”—*Anon.*

RUTH COLLINS was removed to the infirmary some little time before her expected confinement, much to Liddy Dawkins’s delight, to whom a fresh listener was invaluable. Grave and subdued had Ruth become—quiet in speech, sad in look, and with eyes downcast. A very young creature was she to be a mother.

With deep interest she listened to Liddy’s graphic descriptions of the wonders and horrors of St. Bartholomew’s, and quite won her heart thereby. Confidentially did Liddy intimate to one of her gossips—

“That if she could get hold of the fellow, be he who he might, that had ruined that poor girl, or rather child, she would give him a spice of her mind that he would not forget in a hurry. She should like to have the

nursing of him at St. Bartholomew's, she should."

A significant jerking of the head, and vicious gleam of her quick eyes, told, without words, that her mercies would be somewhat cruel.

Dr. Merridan was summoned to Ruth one evening, and was with her all night.

No one had told the widow Collins—no one dared mention her daughter to her; and by what instinct she divined that Ruth's hour of travail had come, was never known; but there she was, pacing underneath the window of the room where Ruth was lying.

There was a dismal sky, and a piercing east wind blowing; cower in the bitter blast did those who were obliged to be abroad, and shiver mightily as they dropped into their homes. For days had that dry arid wind swept over the land, curling up the few remaining leaves, giving the grass a scorched blackened look, and driving the cattle to the shelter of shed and stall.

But numbing as the cold was, the widow faced it from ten o'clock till day-dawn. Ruth's pangs were terrible, and her smothered groans—aye, reached the wretched mother's ears. Towards morning, violent hysterics

came on, and her voice rang out high and shrill.

“Mother—my mother, come to me! Mother—where are you?—come!”

Liddy Dawkins’s husband, who, decent man that he was, had no cognomen of his own, but was just Liddy Dawkins’s husband, neither more nor less—had seen the hard mother pacing up and down; anon stopping when a louder moan of anguish reached her ear, and he went out to her.

“Come in to Ruth, Widow Collins! it’s quite against nature that you should stand there hearkening to her calling out for you, and not come in and comfort her.”

She stopped to listen to what he had to say, then, without a word, resumed her pacing up and down: when the light of the bleak morning broke, she went back to her home. Like a dreaming creature she seemed all the day, not speaking nor answering. Nightfall, and again she was watching the shadows on the blind in Ruth’s chamber. Again the hard black frost and bitter wind; not a creature was out of doors that could win the shelter of a roof, save her, the lone stern watcher.

Who could tell the agonies that mother might be enduring!

The Doctor had not left Ruth. A day of fearful pangs and throes had been hers, and yet her baby was not born. Towards midnight she became delirious with protracted suffering; and then the name (she had obstinately refused to give up) of him who had so guilefully betrayed her youth, rose to her lips.

She supplicated him, as he hoped for God's mercy, to have pity upon *her*—not to cast her off—to help her in her trouble. With the simplest, but the most touching pathos, she appealed to him. She believed herself lying at his feet, and prayed him “not to spurn her!”—not to desert her in her extremity! “she had sacrificed all for him!”

“I am so young—so young—don't leave me to perish. You swore that you loved me, and I believed you. Woe the day, oh! woe the day I ever saw you! Cruel have you been to me—most cruel!”

Half frenzied did her cries become.

“They all spurn me—all! My father and mother are cruellest; they curse me when they should take me to their hearts, and strike me down when they should shelter me. But I can die! the grave is dug and ready for me, and *he* is pointing to it, and saying, ‘Rest and peace—rest and peace!’”

Her cries smote on the stern mother's heart—rang through her brain, but not a step nearer did she get.

Another hour or two of night went by, ere Ruth's pangs were eased, and her child born into the world. Contrary to the Doctor's expectation, it lived—breathed faintly.

Ruth lay quiet—not sleeping, but under the influence of a powerful sedative. The whiteness of her face was corpse-like—the pillow scarce more hueless. Her babe lay on her arm; Liddy had dressed it, and then held the tiny thing for Ruth to see. Something like a smile flickered over her wan features, as her heavy eyes opened feebly to look at it.

Faintly she whispered—

“ Lay it on my arm to comfort me.”

“ You *shall* have it, my poor girl,” said Liddy, with unwonted moisture in her eyes; “ I'm sure you've gone through enough for it.”

Very gently did she lay it down, with its little face and hands upon the mother's bosom, who smiled again as she felt it. Then the room, save for Liddy moving about, was hushed and still. Not an unkind body was Liddy at all; and now that the bustle was over, she bethought herself of the stony-

hearted woman who was pacing to and fro—to and fro in the bitter night-wind.

“She, perhaps, is not so hard as she seems,” she muttered to herself, as she called her husband to the chamber-door, and bid him go and tell the widow Collins that Ruth’s babe was born, and they hoped Ruth was safe, though she had scarcely any life left in her.

He delivered his wife’s message, but not a word of thankfulness escaped her pitiless lips; she turned herself about, and resumed her pacing of the ringing, frost-bound earth.

A most comfortable bedroom was always kept prepared for the Doctor in the infirmary, and thither he had now retired to get some needful rest, desiring Liddy to call him if there was any change in Ruth, and adding, that he should come in the room again in an hour or two.

“I hope you’ll not disturb yourself, Sir; I can manage her now quite well, and you want some sleep very sadly,” returned Liddy, with a sort of chastened familiarity: (great was her awe of the Doctor!)

“Very well, then, I’ll trust to you: but call me at once if the least thing seems wrong.” So saying, and yawning fearfully, he left the room.

A better nurse than Liddy couldn't be ; nothing escaped her notice ; a sort of sleepless vigilance she exercised over all committed to her care, clear-headed, ready-handed, naturally acute, and admirably trained ; she was all the Doctor could wish, but for ——

“ Well, never mind the buts—there must always be buts.”

Liddy's feelings were not generally troublesome ; she was not emotional, but her sympathies were now fairly enlisted for the poor, almost motherless creature, who had gone through such cruel pangs with so much patience.

“ Never saw any one behave better, even in St. Bartholomew's,” she murmured to herself, as she sat watching the pale wan face.

Something or other fidgetted the Doctor, for he shortly afterwards came in, looking sadly sleepy, and altogether *en deshabille*.

“ How is she going on, nurse ? ”

“ Well, as can be, Sir.”

The mother's ears were sharpened to preternatural acuteness. The Doctor's step in the room she heard instantly ; but what else is it she hears, which makes her own chest and throat heave convulsively, and her hands clasp together in wild fear. A scream had come

(only the mother could know it was Ruth's) a cry for help, for help from either God or man.

Ruth's babe was dead; the Doctor had turned down the bed-clothes to see if the little new-born thing was sleeping, and it lay dead upon its mother's arm.

Exhausted with all she had gone through, 'twas no wonder that she fainted, life was almost extinguished; anxious grew the Doctor's face, one hand was on her pulse, the other, holding strong ammonia to her nostrils; her teeth were set, in vain had he tried to get brandy down her throat. Liddy was bathing her forehead and looking very pityingly upon her.

"Poor thing—poor thing! do you think, Sir, she'll get over it?"

"It's more than I can tell; she's at the greatest extremity of weakness now! God help the poor child, she's heavily punished."

A long-drawn sigh—a groan, almost, it was resounded through the room, as he finished speaking.

The Doctor and Liddy looked at each other in surprise, and then at Ruth; the dead were not more impassive than she was.

"*What can it be?*" cried Liddy in affright.

A searching gaze the Doctor gave round the room : at the half-open door stood Widow Collins, her step still hesitating, her stern, hard face, working and struggling with tears she would not *yet* let come.

"Come in—come in, Mrs. Collins," he said, with quick perception and in very brisk tone ; "we want another pair of hands, sadly ; just hold this ammonia, whilst I try to get her to swallow."

She advanced and did as he told her.

"There, now with your other hand hold Ruth's, and chafe it till you get warmth into it. We shall have something to do to bring her round, I fear, she has had such a very hard, difficult time, but I never saw one more patient. Put the baby out of her sight, nurse ; it's stone dead ; I should like to see her rousing up a little, for we have got but a spark of life to fan at."

Long did she lie wholly unconscious, with her mother bending over her ; whose big tears were forcing their way at last ; they streamed down her face, and fell fast on Ruth's hands.

"Her pulse is getting stronger ; she'll be rousing up now," said the Doctor ; "hold this

wine-glass for me, but just move a little aside till I want it?"

She understood him, and concealed herself behind the bed-curtains.

"Now Ruth, come, cheer up, my good girl; I want you to drink some brandy and water: so I'll just raise your head a little; I'll do it, don't stir a finger yourself, and don't speak, I mean to do all the talking myself."

His soothing tones were just delightful; indeed, nobody could be kinder than the Doctor, when people did not tease him, with being stupid, or intractable, or talking nonsense, such as homœopathy; in short, give him his own way entirely, and you need not desire a more amiable Sir Anthony Absolute.

"There, I see you'll soon be better now; the colour is coming back again."

She tried to speak; and he bent down his ear to her.

"Your baby! yes, my poor girl, it is quite dead—there I'll not hinder you from crying, it will do you good, but cry quietly—no sobbing, or exciting yourself.——"

Again her pale lips moved, and again he bent down.

"Have it lying on your arm? Ha!—Um!

—well I don't see that it can do you any harm, but we must take it from you in the morning, Ruth! Do you promise to part with it quietly?" She gave the desired assent—"Mrs. Collins, will you bring us the little dead baby? Your mother is waiting to see you, Ruth; and will nurse you into strength again. There is no nurse, in my opinion, equal to a mother."

Bearing the little cold white infant, all enveloped in flannels as it was, and carrying it as tenderly as if breath was still in it, the mother came to the bed-side, and turning down the bed-clothes, laid that babe of an hour, that had opened its eyes on life only to close them again, on the girl-mother's arm.

"Just over my heart, mother, let it be," said the faint, low voice.

Over the heart she placed it; she took the little hands, and spread them both on the sad yearning bosom, then covered it over, oh so gently!—fearful she seemed of awaking the little sleeper; of calling it back from that soft calm rest to which it had gone.

That done, into each other's eyes gazed the daughter and the mother, with a strange, asking, questioning gaze.

"My mother!" murmured and quivered

from Ruth's pale lips, as she looked into her face, and saw it no longer stern, and cold, and pitiless.

"My daughter!" responded the other, as she passed her arm round Ruth's neck; and weeping and sobbing, weeping and sobbing, passionately kissed her.

END OF VOL. II.

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